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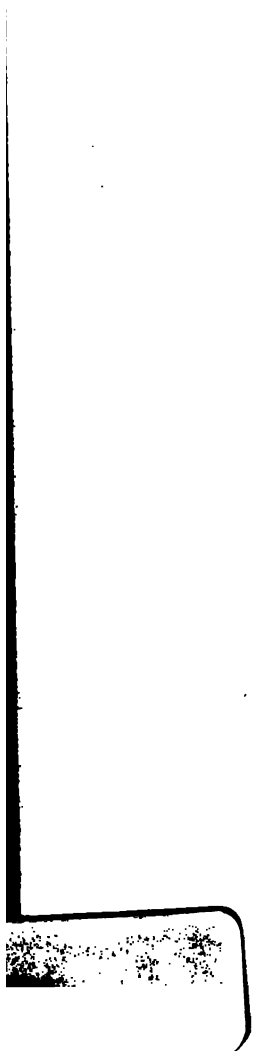


BLACK SPIRITS  
AND  
WHITE

by  
FRANCIS  
ELLIOTT  
TAYLOR



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# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.



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BY

FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "A CHARMING FELLOW,"

ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

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## CHAPTER I.

"GOODNESS! How very strange that we should just have been talking of you, Dr. Flagge!" said my lady.

"I knew he was coming," murmured Ænone; "I felt it in the air."

Dr. Flagge looked leisurely at each member of the circle before he spoke. Then he said, "Lady, I was drawn to you to-night. This is not an hour when the giddy world of fashion pays its accustomed visits. But I am a son of the wilderness. I cannot be trammelled by the hollow forms of ceremony. Such as I am, if you receive me,—good! If not, I must be exiled, lady, that's a fact."

"Oh, besides, you know, I told you I was generally at home of an evening about this hour," replied matter-of-fact Sarah.

Dr. Flagge took no notice of this reminder, but resumed: "Yes; I was drawn towards you. I was attracted to this house. I felt the influence a-drawing of me, and I came. I am not accustomed to the courtly etiquette which surrounds the fair daughters of a European aristocracy like yourself. Your mansions, your manners, your feudal ceremonies and traditions, are not for me. I have snuffed the air upon our boundless Western plains, ma'am, along with Appanawchees and the tameless bison."

"La!" said Sarah. "Won't you sit down? And hadn't you better take that thing off? This room's so warm."

"That thing" was a large and picturesque mantle which Dr. Flagge had wrapped around him with much careful disposition of its folds. Beneath it he wore a loose jacket studded with silver buttons, and left open at the breast so as to display a scarlet shirt. He complied with my lady's recommendation to take off the mantle, and laid it on a chair in a distant part of the room. Sarah's objection to so unconventional a proceeding as paying an evening visit in such a costume as Dr. Flagge now wore, and even her anxiety as to what Lobley would think of it, were obliterated by

the enumeration of herself among the fair daughters of a European aristocracy. This American might not be precisely genteel according to the Bolithian pattern, but at least he had an exquisite sense of what was genteel in other people! And then his language, Sarah declared to herself, was most beautiful!

Dr. Flagge had saluted Miss Lowry with a half sullen, half obsequious bow; and had claimed acquaintance with Enone somewhat more familiarly. "I knew I should find you here," he said. But he said it in so low a tone as to escape Lady Lowry's ear.

"Didn't you mesmerize Miss Balasso?" asked Rosamond, with her frank eyes fixed wondering on his face.

"Yes; Miss Balasso is a trance medium of very remarkable powers, which only need developing to become phenomenal."

"What is a trance medium?" inquired Rosamond with grave interest.

"A trance medium is,—a medium whose receptivity to spirit influences is greatest during the magnetic slumber: a medium whose organism lends itself to the transcendental utterances of superior souls, and is psychologically sensitive to the impressions of a higher sphere. That's a trance medium!"

1

"I don't understand it," whispered Rosamond to her aunt. "What do you think it is, Aunt Mary?"

"*I think, dear, that it is nonsense,*" replied Mary very quietly.

Meanwhile Flagge had established himself picturesquely on the couch near to my lady, and opposite to Enone, who had seated herself at a little table, on which she leaned her elbow and remained gazing at the medium with dilated eyes.

"You have here to-night, lady, a very rare and precious organization," said Flagge, addressing himself to Lady Lowry. "This young native of the classic soil of Greece is endowed with a very wonderful degree of sensitiveness."

Sarah stared a little glumly. "Rare" and "precious" and "sensitive" were epithets to be applied with some discrimination, to persons of condition,—herself, for example!

"Miss Balasso is staying here with my step-daughter. We wished to allow Miss Rosamond Lowry the pleasure of having a young—a—a—companion, and at the same time to improve her music by getting a professional person who would look after her practising," returned Sarah, with as much grandeur of

manner as she could assume. But Flagge would not allow himself to be too much awed by my lady. If she knew her advantages, he knew his.

"Miss Nony is a fine musician, I understand," said he. "But she is more than that. She has the capacity to become one of the most remarkable clairvoyants I ever met with. You are fortunate, lovely lady, in possessing her acquaintance. I tell you that there are many persons of exalted position and aristocratic fashion in this metropolis, who would give their ears to get hold of her."

"But I am not to be 'got hold of,'" said Enone, haughtily.

"Not by the hollow world," interposed Dr. Flagge, "but to the claim of friendship you are responsive. The antique spirit of the godlike Grecians lives again in you. It lives again also in a product of our Western continent. Did you ever read the works of our admired poet Walt Whitman?"

"No."

"Didn't you? Well, I've been told by classical professors that his style is very like Pindar's. I believe Pindar was a prominent literary character among the Greeks at some date B.C. I don't pretend to classical learning

myself. The philosophy of natur' has chiefly occupied my attention ;—that, and the phenomena of spiritism, and a few commercial experiments in a dry goods store out in Tennessee. But trade is too limited and trammelling in its conditions to suit a temperament like mine, which requires the boundless freedom of the open firmament, and the simplicity of the primæval savage, to develop all it ought to."

Lady Lowry thought this sounded uncommonly fine. But it did not distract her attention from the point she had fixed her mind on. "I *should* like to see you mesmerize Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge," she said.

"We should have to ask leave," answered Flagge, glancing round in a quick, cunning way, and tossing the long, scanty locks off his forehead with his hand.

"Ask leave! Whose leave, pray?" demanded my lady, majestically.

"The spirits' leave. They are greatly interested in Miss Nony. There is a Grecian spirit that's partic'larly attached to her. Probably a remote ancestor. They do hover around their descendants sometimes. I've known several cases."

"Will you allow me to ask, Dr. Flagge, if

this spirit converses with you in Greek?" said Mary Lowry.

"No, madam; *being* a spirit, he is aware that I don't understand that language. He communicates through the medium of the English tongue."

"Why, of course, Mary," said my lady. "It would be very stupid to talk Greek to a person who doesn't understand it!"

"Yes; that would be very stupid,—if the object of talking were always to be understood. But spirits (at least, when enclosed in mortal bodies) sometimes talk for the purpose of not being understood."

Rosamond, who had a great deal of the *enfant terrible* about her, asked aloud, "But if he is an ancient Greek spirit, how did he learn English? English wasn't invented when he died."

"Rosamond!" cried my lady, severely, "you ought not to talk in that way! It's wicked, although you may not mean it.—Would you mind asking the Greek gentleman, Dr. Flagge, if he has any objection to your mesmerizing Miss Balasso for me? Here is a little table,—if you wouldn't mind? Perhaps you would like some refreshment first, though! I suppose you wouldn't care for coffee?"



Dr. Flagge evidently did not care for coffee. It was, he said, too exciting to his nervous system. But, as he had dined early, some hot brandy and water, and a sandwich, would probably facilitate the "manifestations." "*I have found bottled stout and oysters give considerable of a support,*" said Dr. Flagge, pensively.

Rosamond was desired to ring the bell, and the servant who responded to the summons was told to send Lobley to speak with my lady. Mary was amazed at her sister-in-law's boldness in suggesting to Lobley the preparation of food and drink at that abnormal hour. But even Lobley's elaborate look of stupefaction on receipt of the order did not awe my lady from her purpose. She conveyed some insinuation of an apology to the ducal one. She was at some pains to explain to him that Dr. Flagge's delicacy of constitution caused him to require sustenance rather frequently. And she skilfully threw out a hint that she was aware how considerately Her Grace of Belturbet had been wont to treat mediums. But, having made these concessions to Lobley's feelings, she completed her order about the refreshment.

"Is the tray to be brought up yere, my

lady?" asked Lobley, conveying with admirable dramatic effect that he really was at a loss to conceive what would happen next, but that he, for his part, would not be held responsible.

"Well, I don't know, Lobley. I think—perhaps——"

"Oh yes; bring it right here into this parlour," said Dr. Flagge, affably. And he added, turning to his hostess, "The atmosphere here is favourable and agreeable. There's no good in toting things round from one corner to another. Indeed, it frequently weakens the power. Just go ahead, young man, and bring the refreshment here, right away."

The expression of Lobley's countenance on being thus addressed was one of such overwhelming dignity and disgust as even a town-bred butler has seldom been known to wear. Without casting a glance in the direction of the offending Flagge, he stood for one instant dumb and motionless. Then, bending with a kind of condescending deference towards his mistress, he said slowly, "I believe I have understood your ladyship's directions. The tray *is* to be brought up yere!" And retreated in good order.

"I can't promise, you know," said Flagge, "that any manifestations will happen. They may, or they may not. That is one of the tests of their reality. If it was imposture—as some of the unbelievers claim—they'd always happen, you know."

This was said so obviously at Mary Lowry, that she replied at once, as if she had been addressed by name, "Does it not strike you as singular that these sounds and movements do not happen except when you expect them?"

"You never were more mistaken in your life, lady," returned Flagge. "They do happen. They are happening all the time."

"Not at this moment, for example?"

"Well, there are adverse influences to be taken into account, I reckon. You can't expect the spirits to like to manifest themselves when the conditions are not favourable. But as to not happening except when they're looked for—— Why, do you know, madam" (turning to Lady Lowry), "that I have been lifted right out of my hammock aboard a ship in the Pacific Ocean, and transported up on deck, by the spirits? I have been floated around the lofty summit of a gum-tree in the primæval forest during a dark and moonless night, and let down again into the wigwam

where a Red Indian was asleep without awakening of him! I have had quite a number of tropical leaves descend upon me through the air as I lay in bed in a hotel at Liverpool! But I don't feel like talking about these circumstances in general society, because I *have* met with persons who don't believe 'em!"

Any discussion as to the state of mind of those singular persons who did not believe Dr. Flagge's assertions was prevented by the arrival of the refreshments. And Dr. Flagge set himself to eat and drink in a rapid and ravenous manner, acquired possibly amongst his interesting friends the Appanawchees. The tray contained cold chicken, sandwiches, some confectionery, a small decanter of cognac, hot water, and sugar. Flagge expressed his approbation of Lobley's purveying. "That waiter of yours, madam," said he, "has considerable of a notion of providing a slight repast on short notice. He might be a little smarter, and a little sprightlier, but he is not without gumption, lady, I tell you."

"Waiter!" exclaimed my lady, to whom the word suggested a puffy-faced man in shabby black at the Blue Boar in Lambrook. "He's not a waiter at all! He's my butler, and a

most superior servant. He has lived with the Duke of Belturbet!" Then, seeing that the eating and drinking had come to an end, Sarah, with her own hand, pushed the little round table close to Flagge and said, "*Would you mind asking him now?* The Greek gentleman, I mean."

Dr. Flagge consented to make the experiment, and the bell was rung for the tray to be removed. Flagge, however, retained a tumbler full of hot brandy and water, which he placed on a marble console within reach of his hand; and then he declared himself ready to begin.

He decided that the sitters at the table should be only three: Lady Lowry, Enone, and himself. Rosamond was anxious to place her hands on the table also; but this was forbidden, as Dr. Flagge felt, he said, that her "magnetic conditions" were not favourable. So Rosamond perched herself on the arm of the chair in which Mary was seated, and watched the proceedings of the medium with childlike eagerness and curiosity.

Dr. Flagge, his hostess, and Enone then placed their hands on the table; and after a very short time—some three or four minutes at most—taps and cracks were heard, and the

table dipped down once or twice in the direction of Enone, and away from the medium, who was seated opposite to her.

"It will probably communicate by tippings this evening," said Dr. Flagge.

"Do ask it something!" said my lady.

Upon this, Flagge glanced round a little uneasily at Mary, and said, after an instant's pause, "Let Nony put the questions herself. Ask if there's any one here for you, won't you?"

There was a brief pause. Then Enone said in low, distinct tones, "Is there any spirit present?"

Immediately were heard three faint taps, and the table bowed itself towards her. "There!" cried my lady. "Did you ever? *Isn't* it wonderful?"

"Does the spirit wish to communicate with me?" resumed Enone.

"Yes."

"Is it a spirit I have known in life?"

"No."

"Who is it?"

No answer.

"We'd better call the alphabet," said Dr. Flagge, in a business-like way.

This being done, it resulted that the spirit

was the spirit of a Greek deceased "about a thousand years ago." He declined to give a more precise date. He also declined to give his name. He stated that he had lived in Athens, but, beyond a boggling attempt to spell out "Parthenon," was unable to say anything about the city as it had existed in his lifetime. He had been a very distinguished person, however; and was an ancestor of Spiridion Balassopoulo, in whom, and in whose daughter, he continued to take an affectionate interest.

"Can you tell me where my father is now?" asked CEnone, earnestly.

Some bendings and bowings of the table followed, which Dr. Flagge interpreted to mean Asia Minor. But Sarah, not feeling the smallest interest in the whereabouts of Signor Spiridion Balassopoulo, impatiently interposed, and urged the medium to get leave to mesmerize Miss Balasso. This the spirit at once accorded. And after announcing that he loved Lady Lowry with a pure affection, and that her head was surrounded by a halo visible to spirit eyes, he said "good night;" and the table at once resumed its equilibrium, and kept it.

"Now, Miss Nony," said Flagge, "just you

set yourself right there, in that easy chair opposite. Come, and I'll make a few passes."

Mary Lowry rose, and drew her sister-in-law on one side. "Sarah," she said, "do you think it right to suffer this to go on? The girl is here under your protection, remember."

"Right to suffer it? Goodness, why not? How queer you are, Mary! What harm can it do her?"

"I do not know. I cannot tell. But I feel uneasy about it. I wish you would not allow it."

Dr. Flagge now paused in making the passes, and, casting a very malignant glance towards Mary, he said, "I am conscious of a counter influence at work here. There's something disturbing of the magnetic current, and distracting Miss Nony's attention."

"There, Mary, you see!" said my lady, impatiently. "You'll spoil it all. I do wish you'd be quiet."

Mary had no choice but to resign herself to be silent. At one time the thought crossed her mind that she might go and appeal to her brother. But a moment's reflection convinced her that such an appeal would in all probability be made in vain; and that if made in vain it would do rather harm than good.



Presently CEnone, whose eyes had been fixed on the medium, sank backward in her chair, with closed eyelids, and in another minute Flagge declared her to be completely asleep. The aspect of the girl's wan face was pathetic in its helpless quietude. She lay with her head leaning against a crimson velvet cushion. Her black hair surrounded her thin white face like a cloud, and her eyelids drooped heavily.

"Are you asleep, dear?" asked Mary, speaking very gently.

There was no response.

Rosamond pressed her aunt's hand nervously, and drew near to CEnone; but the medium motioned her back. "You must not touch her!" he said, hastily.

"You speak to her, Dr. Flagge," said Lady Lowry, who began to feel a little trepidation at the absolute marble immobility of the girl's face. Then Flagge said slowly, "CEnone Balassopoulo, do you hear me?"

A sort of ripple ran over her face, and a faint movement of the lips followed; but no sound.

"You hear me, and you can answer me. Do so."

She made a visible effort to speak, but again without result.

"Speak, I say! You can speak. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," was breathed forth in a low, hissing whisper.

There was an instant's awe-stricken silence.

"Is she really asleep?" asked Rosamond, rather tremulously.

"You may speak to her yourself, and try," said Flagge.

Rosamond did so; but Ænone's face remained as still as that of a statue.

"Put your hand on mine and then speak to her."

Rosamond obeyed, and asked, "Do you know me, Nona?"

Immediately a slight smile played on Ænone's lips, and she answered, "Yes;" in the same faint whispering tone as before.

"Are you convinced now that she is in a magnetic sleep?" said Dr. Flagge. And he glanced with a kind of suppressed triumph at Mary as he spoke.

"Convinced? Of course!" interposed my lady. "It's wonderful. Quite awful to see how dead-like she looks. But now, Dr. Flagge, do let me ask her a question or two, will you?"

Flagge took my lady's hand, and she began:

"Miss Balasso, I should be much obliged to you if you would ask some of the spirits whether I shall have any more visits from that spirit who came for me the other evening, and who I most particularly want to speak with."

Enone's brow contracted itself uneasily, but she did not speak.

"We'd better not fatigue her too much now," said Flagge. "She'll be quite clairvoyant after I've mesmerized her a time or two more."

"Oh, but I particularly wish an answer to this question now," returned Sarah, obstinately, and with an air expressive of a firm refusal to be cheated. "I only allow you to put her to sleep here, in order that I might get an answer."

"But, Sarah! If it is likely to do the girl harm——!" exclaimed Mary, earnestly.

"Nonsense about doing her harm! The spirit of the Greek gentleman said she might be mesmerized, and I suppose *he* knew whether it would hurt her or not!"

"Allow me to put a few questions for you," said Dr. Flagge, relinquishing her ladyship's hand, and making a few more passes with his own above Enone's head. "You see, you have a great amount of mediumistic power

yourself, lady ; and that is why your contact is distressing to her, and disturbs the magnetic currents. With Miss Rosamond here, it's just like touching a vegetable to take hold of her hand. There's no sympathy or antipathy of the vital fluids, you understand."

Sarah did not at all understand, but she was mollified by being told that she had some power which Rosamond was devoid of.

"Can you see?" continued Flagge, addressing himself to Enone.

"Yes."

"Then speak. Tell me what you see."

"Trees, a house—but it is dim. Many trees."

"Look again."

Her mouth dropped wearily, and her breast heaved as if with a sigh, but no sigh was heard.

"What do you see near the house?"

"A dog."

Lady Lowry clasped her hands together, and turned pale. "It's old Connaught!" she whispered breathlessly. "I thought directly she said 'many trees' that it must be Lowry Place, and the dog confirms it. Oh, do make her go on."

But at this point Dr. Flagge positively

declared that he was afraid to keep CEnone any longer in the mesmeric sleep. He would mesmerize her again some other time for Lady Lowry, but now she must absolutely be awakened. He proceeded to wave his hands about in front of the sleeping girl, and to fan her with a silk handkerchief until she began to recover consciousness. The moment she did so, and whilst Mary and Rosamond were busied about her, fanning her, and sprinkling eau de Cologne on her forehead, he whispered quickly to Lady Lowry, "Don't have those two next time; you'll get very different results without them. I don't know why, of course, but it seems that Miss Lowry is partic'larly objectionable to the spirits. It's my notion they've something to say as they don't want her to hear," he added, with a cunning, searching look at my lady.

Meanwhile CEnone was completely awakened, but she seemed languid and confused. She remembered nothing, she said, of what had passed during her sleep. At Mary's urgent recommendation she withdrew at once to bed, and as she went away with Rosamond her great dark eyes rested on the medium almost to the last with a singular look—almost of dread—which made a painful impression on Mary Lowry.

"I do trust that this may not be injurious to Enone's health," said Mary, when the two girls had left the room. "For my part, I should be inclined to ask the opinion of a competent physician."

"Some competent physicians don't believe in mesmerism, I'm told," observed Flagge, with a scarcely disguised sneer. "They might say it was all humbug, you know; and humbug don't hurt anybody's health, as I know of."

Then he took his leave of Lady Lowry in a manner ingeniously compounded of flattery, obsequiousness, and familiarity. To Mary he vouchsafed only a very cool, and not specially respectful, bow.

He had considerably extended his knowledge of various circumstances concerning the Lowry family since his first visit to Sir Cosmo's house; and he thought himself quite secure enough in its mistress's good graces to afford to wage war—secret if it might be, open if it must be—with Miss Lowry of Lowry.

## CHAPTER II.

THE concerts of the Czernovic family pleased that portion of the London public which was not too fine to show itself at a place of entertainment in October. The room in which they performed was well filled every evening; and they became so prosperous that Mrs. Peppiat felt no scruples in getting rid of them. They could pay their way, and needed no forbearance in the matter of their weekly rent. So Mrs. Peppiat gave them notice to leave her rooms, and explained to Major Maude, that though the Czernovics were good quiet people enough, yet they had certain prejudices against brooms, dusters, soap, and water, which rendered them not altogether desirable inmates.

The family took their dismissal with perfect good humour, and removed themselves to another lodging near the Strand, recommended to them by Bob Doery, who had a room in the

same house. The landlord of this house called himself accountant and secretary to the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. He lived in a little grimy parlour on the ground floor, where he received numerous visits once a week from shabby persons, male and female, carrying little yellow account-books adorned outside with a wood-cut representing a pair of clasped hands. These little yellow account-books held the records of the bearer's transactions with the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. They contained the materials for many a piteous story of poverty, and struggle, and hope deferred, and slow, dreadful sinking into the depths which underlie the thin crust of shabby gentility.

Mr. Quickit (that was the landlord's name) had his drawing-rooms unlet at present. The Czernovic family occupied the whole of the second floor, and Mr. Robert Doery's modest apartment was on the third floor. Mr. Quickit was a dirty, civil man, with a trick of laughing and rubbing his hands while he talked, and a habit of contradicting most assertions made to him, with a most smiling submissive-ness of demeanour. He complained sadly of the emptiness of his first floor. Such splendid drawing-rooms they were! In so marvel-



lously central a situation ! And at such a ridiculously moderate rate ! And yet they were empty, and had been empty for four months.

The Czernovics paid well for their rooms on the second floor, and were peculiarly popular lodgers with the maid of all work, inasmuch as they never rang the bell, and never wanted their rooms swept. Major Maude—to whom they had recourse in all emergencies—had guaranteed their ability to pay the rent, and with Major Maude's word Mr. Quickit professed himself abundantly satisfied. He observed pleasantly that he liked professionals for his part, entertained no prejudice against them, and had various dealings with them ;—as indeed he had, and of a very profitable nature for the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. "But," said he, "I wish, Major Maude, that you could find a tenant for my drawing-rooms. Such drawing-rooms ! I have had a baronet in those rooms, sir ; a baronet of ancient family. He used to come up from the country twice or thrice in the year, and always occupied my drawing-rooms. He delighted in them ! "

"I suppose he paid you highly, Mr. Quickit ? "

"No, sir; he did not pay me highly. No, Major Maude, ha, ha, ha! Far from it."

"Then it was scarcely worth your while to keep the rooms for him."

"Pardon me, it was quite worth my while. Amply worth my while. I should not have done it otherwise. I can't afford to be sentimental, Major Maude, ha, ha!"

"Oh! well, you must hope the baronet will turn up again."

"Not at all, sir. Not at all. He can never turn up again—in any remunerative form—because he's dead, Major Maude! Ha, ha, ha, ha! I read it in the papers."

Major Maude did not feel himself called upon to seek for any one, baronet or otherwise, to replace Mr. Quickit's lost tenant. But Papa Czernovic announced to his landlord one day that he thought he had found a lodger for him. The person in question was Dr. Flagge, who had made acquaintance with the Czernovic family by means of CEnone. Dr. Flagge was always willing and anxious to extend his acquaintance in all directions. He had found it very useful, in the course of his career, to know people of all sorts and conditions. His fine patrons had as little notion of his life when he was not evoking spirits in

their drawing-rooms, as the spectators in a theatre have of the busy world behind the scenes. A great part of Dr. Flagge's existence was passed in a sort of social behind-the-scenes. He was supposed by the Honourable Mrs. Wigmores of the world to live a kind of recluse and savage existence in the heart of London : and to be an impracticable, strange sort of being, whom the ordinary pursuits and amusements of civilization delighted not. The Honourable Mr. Wigmores knew better—or some of them did. But as the more numerous, and incomparably the more powerful, of Dr. Flagge's clients were women, that did not much matter to him. The odds and ends of information picked up by Dr. Flagge in his behind-the-scenes existence were frequently found by a singular coincidence to be reproduced by the spirits at his next *séance*. And the astonishing utterances of Dr. Flagge's spirits about things "which he couldn't *possibly* have known, you know!" might have appeared less astonishing to the medium's fashionable patrons and patronesses, had they been sufficiently mindful of that general tendency which they shared with the unfashionable classes ;—the tendency, namely, of most human beings to talk about other people's affairs.

From the first moment when old Czernovic spoke to him about the vacant drawing-rooms which had been tenanted by a noble Englishman named Sir Rupert Lowry, Flagge showed a decided inclination to take the rooms. And Papa Czernovic returned to announce to his landlord that he believed he had got him a lodger. "A vonderful Mensch, Mr. Queek! Vonderfool!" said Papa Czernovic. "He is a medium. Makes come the spirits."

"Ha, ha! Very good, Mr. Churnywig, ve—ry good! But does he make come the cash, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

On this point Mr. Quickit was soon satisfied. Dr. Flagge came to look at the drawing-rooms, expressed his approbation of them, and agreed to the price asked for them, and paid down a month's rent in advance. He proved to be a quiet lodger, who gave little trouble; and, in short, Mr. Quickit had no fault to find with him, except that he incensed the curtains of the drawing-room with tobacco-smoke during the whole of the time which he passed in that apartment. But the hours he spent there were not very many. He soon struck up a kind of intimacy with his landlord; and would frequently spend the evening, or great part of the evening, in the little grimy parlour

surrounded by volumes and papers containing the archives of the Loan Society presided over by those steely and implacable patron saints, Castor and Pollux.

Dr. Flagge was liberal and convivial on these occasions. He treated Mr. Quickit to grog and cigars, and would listen by the hour to that gentleman's anecdotes of the odd experiences he had had in the course of his connection with the Loan Society. But what particularly interested Dr. Flagge were Mr. Quickit's reminiscences of his lodger the baronet. Mr. Quickit was a talkative man—extremely talkative. But he had an amount of caution which, perhaps, is more often found in company with loquacity than is generally supposed. Moreover, Mr. Quickit's experience during the many years which he had passed, chiefly in the grimy parlour, had made him a pretty good judge of character; at all events, of certain sorts of character, and Mr. Quickit mistrusted Dr. Flagge. Besides, the queer spirit of contradiction which characterized him operated to make him restive under any species of cross-examination, however cunningly conducted. Like the celebrated Irish pig, the only way to induce Mr. Quickit to go to Limerick was by persuading him that he

was on his road to Cork ; but, unlike that confiding creature, Mr. Quickit was not easily deceived as to the direction in which it was really desired to lead him. Flagge's acuteness soon enabled him to discover that the best plan was not to try to lead him at all, but to let him talk on, merely throwing in a word or two now and then, which gave Quickit an opportunity for contradiction, and acted as a stimulus to his conversational powers.

Sometimes Bob Doery would join the two smokers in the grimy parlour ; and sometimes, but much more rarely, Papa Czernovic would appear in the evening after coming home from his concert, clad in a ruby-coloured dressing-gown made out of an old merino dress of his wife's, and with a bandana handkerchief twisted round his head. Occasionally Dr. Flagge would entertain a select circle in his own rooms. There was no stint at these *symposia* of spirituous liquor and tobacco. Flagge was open-handed in his hospitality, and grudged no man a chance of getting drunk at his expense. But of drunkenness there was scarcely any amongst his associates. Doery, whilst availing himself to the utmost limit of prudence of the Doctor's Bourbon whisky, inflexibly stopped short at that limit,

and would not have risked an unsteady hand or a muddled brain for his work next morning to swallow Olympian nectar. Mr. Quickit could imbibe very large quantities of grog without its producing in him the slightest approach to intoxication. And as for Papa Czernovic, his usual beverage was a tumbler of brown tea, with a slice of lemon in it. But he would smoke with extraordinary energy and perseverance, and consumed large quantities of Flagge's cigars with a silent and concentrated relish.

Another visitor who would drop in for an hour or so in the evening was Captain Peppiat. Flagge had made very marked advances towards cultivating the Captain's acquaintance, and Pep, always willing to be sociable, and utterly guileless—strong, too, in that impetuosity with which he had defied the most fraudulent speculators to fleece him beyond a certain point—found no difficulty in associating with the celebrated medium, whose stories of wild life in the West amused him vastly. Dr. Flagge had entirely refrained from any allusion to the spirits in his communication with Quickit, but to Pep he would occasionally launch forth into some narration of wonders uttered in a studiously quiet and

matter-of-fact tone, and with an odd air of self-repression, as though much more might be said were the hearer but ripe for it.

It had happened in the years gone by, that Peppiat had visited the grimy parlour, carrying in his pocket one of the little account books with the clasped hands on it. And at that period his interviews with the smiling Mr. Quickit had been by no means agreeable ones. But in Flagge's room the secretary of the Loan Society doffed the cares of office, and appeared in the light of a boon companion endowed with unsuspected social merits. Pep, in his open way, claimed acquaintance with him at once. "How are you, Mr. Quickit?" said he. "It's some time since we met. I dare say you don't remember me?"

"Oh, pardon me! Excuse me, Captain Peppiat! I remember you perfectly. I never forget people, specially people I have met in the way of business, ha, ha, ha! But they don't always like to be reminded—eh? of our little transactions. I said nothing till you spoke, you know. How d'ye do? How *do* you do?"

"Faith, my dear sir," returned Pep, good-humouredly, "I don't wonder at any dislike on the part of the—the—the victims, to be



reminded of their little transactions with our friends, Castor and Pollux. Uncommonly sharp practitioners, Castor and Pollux ! ”

Mr. Quickit seemed to take this speech as a compliment ; and laughed with his head on one side, and rubbed his hands over and over one another, exclaiming, “ Oh, tut, tut, tut ! Not at all, not at all, not at all, Captain Peppiat ! Quite the contrary, ha, ha, ha ! Quite—the—contrary ! ” with an air of great gratification.

Later on in the evening Mr. Quickit, finding himself seated next to Peppiat, reverted to the period when the Captain had been a borrower of the Loan Society in an almost plaintive tone, like that of a man recalling some touching incident of Auld Lang Syne.

“ Ah, those were the days ! Those were the days, sir ! Why, there were parties connected with the C. and P. at that time, Captain Peppiat, of the very highest credit — not merely *money* credit, ha, ha, ha !—and position. You have no idea of the sort of parties ; none whatever.”

“ Shylock would come near my idea of the sort of party,” returned the Captain blandly, as he stirred his punch.

“ No, no, no ! Not at all ! By no means,

by—no—means. Nothing like Shylock. I'm fond of the drama, Captain Peppiat, and I can recollect the time when a pit order to Drury Lane was one of the greatest treats you could offer me. Ah, well, all that's bright must fade, you know, Captain, ha, ha, ha! But the parties connected at that time with the C. and P. were quite tip-toppers;—only they didn't wish their connection with the Society to be made public."

"That was wise," observed Pep, drily.

"There was—I may say it now, for he's dead and gone; I read it in *The Times*. Quite a paragraph to himself, headed 'Death of Sir Rupert Lowry of Lowry.'"

"Who?" cried the Captain, dropping his spoon with a clatter.

"Hulloa!" said Flagge, looking round very coolly, "what's the trouble now?"

"Nothing! only our friend here unexpectedly mentioned the name of a near connection of mine by marriage, and——"

"Did he? Well, now I should guess you'd a rather uncommon amount of family feeling, Captain. You might unexpectedly mention all the connections by marriage I ever had, and throw in my blood relations into the bargain, without my exhibiting of the slightest

emotion, much less spilling my spoon upon the carpet, I tell you."

"You don't mean to say," said Peppiat to Mr. Quickit, "that Sir Rupert Lowry was connected with Castor and Pollux?"

"Yes, I do. He had money in the concern, sir. He withdrew his capital after a time, but he had made a good thing of it. A model man of business was Sir Rupert Lowry, ha, ha, ha! And so he was a relation of yours, Captain Peppiat? Dear, dear, how oddly things come about!"

"Oddly indeed!"

"He lodged in my drawing-rooms, you know, whenever he came to town."

"Lodged here? In these rooms?"

"In these identical rooms, Captain Peppiat."

"Why, he was very likely sitting above my head many a time when I came to arrange my business with Castor and Pollux, and I hadn't the least notion of it."

"Hadn't you, indeed? Very good, ha, ha, ha! Ve—ry good! Oh, but the world is wonderfully small in one sense, Captain Peppiat. My experience in the Loan Society has shown me the extraordinary" — (Mr. Quickit pronounced this word "extreeor-

dinary")—"way in which everybody is connected with everybody else. Life is a sort of country dance, sir—a kind of Sir Roger de Coverley, where you cross hands, and down the middle, and set to corners, and the rest of it; and no matter what partner you start with, you have to take a turn with all and sundry before you've finished, Captain Peppiat."

At this point Dr. Flagge began the recital of some strange adventure he had had among the Appanawchees, and there was no further talk between Quickit and the Captain about Sir Rupert Lowry.

But Pep was a good deal impressed by the oddity of the coincidence, that he should have been borrowing money of Sir Rupert Lowry without knowing it, and he told his faithful Leonora all that Quickit had said to him. "What a close old file he must have been, Nora!" said Pep. "I never heard of his having lodgings in town in my life."

But Mrs. Peppiat said she remembered hearing her sister say that Sir Rupert had been for many years in the habit of going up to London at certain stated intervals, to look after some house property which he had there. "But," said she, "I believe he never gave any other address to his family except his

club. I remember Cosmo telling me that once, at Malta."


"I wonder if Mary Lowry knows where he lodged," said the Captain.

"Probably not; and what does it matter? I would advise you not to speak to her on the subject, Northam. It couldn't be pleasant to her to know that her father was mixed up with a set of usurious skinflints, like those horrid bloodsuckers!"

It was thus that good Mrs. Peppiat, with feminine emphasis, and a confusion of metaphors which is not exclusively feminine, designated that respectable company of citizens, the Castor and Pollux Loan Society.

## CHAPTER III.

MAJOR MAUDE had not found his evening at Lady Lowry's very delightful, and yet he could not keep himself away from her house in Green Street. To be sure, there did not seem to be any particular reason why he should keep himself away; and yet he tried to do so,—or fancied that he tried. But his feet turned in that direction with a curious persistence. No matter what the errand he was bound on, no matter what part of the town he began his day's walk in, sooner or later he was sure to find himself close to Sir Cosmo's house in the course of the afternoon. It was quite surprising what a number of reasons he found for being in that neighbourhood every day. It really seemed as if all the business he had in life had concentrated itself into a very small circle, of which Sir Cosmo Lowry's house was the central point. He passed and repassed that dingy mansion



until he knew by heart every dint and bump in the massive and ugly lump of iron-work on the street door, which served as a knocker, and the soot-laden iron pine-apples at the top of the area railings.

He did call on Lady Lowry rather frequently, but if he had visited her even half as often as he passed her door, he would have spent a considerable proportion of his whole existence under her ladyship's roof. Sarah had been well inclined towards Major Maude. The peculiar charm attaching to "officers" in the imagination of the female population of Lambrook—which was a garrison town—continued to exercise a certain sway over Lady Lowry after her elevation to a higher sphere. Then, too, Major Maude was good-looking, and, as she phrased it, "quite the gentleman." She was more easy and less artificial with him than with most people. She was not on her guard against being ridiculed by him if she should chance to transgress any of the unwritten laws of fashionable behaviour which it was the chief study of her life to fulfil. Major Maude was such a good-natured, harmless creature. The unaffected gentle sweetness of his nature was recognized, if not appreciated, by Sarah. She felt instinctively

that he would not assert himself at her expense in any direction whatever. And although she probably considered this to be a result rather of weakness than strength, was yet it was a sort of weakness which it indubitably agreeable to meet with. And, on the whole, she patronized Major Maude, with fine touches of unconscious comedy, and much self-satisfied condescension.

Sir Cosmo, for his part, made no advances towards renewing his old intimacy with Maude. When he saw him, he spoke to him with his usual unsympathetic indifference of manner, just as he would have addressed a complete stranger. But as Major Maude did not go to Green Street specially to see the master of the house, and as the master of the house made himself disagreeable to all the world with considerable impartiality, this did not operate to check Maude's visits. Neither did his own antipathy to Lady Lowry avail to check them. Strong as were the repellant powers of my lady and her husband, the force of Mary's attraction overcame them.

Maude certainly did not reciprocate my lady's liking. Indeed, he regarded her with an amount of dislike which increased day by day, and at which he was himself surprised,



whenever the strength of the feeling forced itself on his attention. Why should he be so angry with the foolish, selfish little woman? What did her coldness of heart, and dulness of head, matter to him? And yet it was really impossible, he told himself, for any one to witness her arrogant presumption to Mary Lowry, and her absolute insensibility to Mary Lowry's noble qualities, without disgust and indignation.

Poor Major Maude! It was, at all events, impossible for him to do so. To deny, or ignore, Mary Lowry's perfections, was in his eyes equivalent to a general negation of all excellence. Rosamond and he were great allies, chiefly by virtue of the former's love and admiration for her aunt; and C  none won a stronger hold on the Major's sympathy and attention than she had ever before possessed, by saying one day in his presence that Miss Lowry's thoughts shone in her face like sunlight through alabaster.

Maude had always felt a compassionate interest in C  none ever since he first made her acquaintance. She was then with the Czernovics in an English provincial town, where Maude was in garrison. The Czernovics were in severe straits, out of which Major Maude

good-naturedly helped them, paying their rent, and also some of their bills. Maude had been struck by the appearance and manner of the elf-like child, so different in all respects from the family with whom she lived. And Papa Czernovic had willingly related to him all that he knew of her history—which was little more than that which the reader knows already. Enone, on her side, conceived a romantic idolatry for this great, strong, gentle, handsome Englishman, who appeared in her life from time to time like a prince in a fairy story, cutting Gordian knots of embarrassment, in which the Czernovics had a peculiar gift of entangling themselves—a sort of magnificent sun-god, or at the least demi-god, in whose beneficent presence debt and duns were dissipated as the mists of the morning, and sheriffs' officers fled abashed like night-birds overtaken by the dawn !

Then, later, during one of the long intervals which occurred between Signor Balassopoulo's communications, Maude had told Miss Cribb, Enone's schoolmistress, that he would be responsible for the payment due for the girl's board and education. The next remittance which arrived after that, from her father, was more welcome to Enone than any former one

had ever been. Hitherto she had had no sense of humiliation in accepting whatever help was given her by the Czernovics. It seemed natural. She had been accustomed to it for several years ; and she believed that her father had reimbursed them, although in an irregular fashion. It never occurred to her to feel herself under any special weight of obligation to them. But when Major Maude undertook to be paymaster, Enone suddenly became conscious that her position was a painful one. She scarcely understood why it hurt her so much. Certainly she had no doubt of Major Maude's perfect generosity of feeling. To her thinking no one had ever conferred favours with such simplicity and delicacy. And yet she thought that she would rather have been beholden to any one in the world than to him.

When some money did come from her father, she went at once to the schoolmistress, and told her that the payment then made would be the last she could afford ; but that she was willing to remain in the school if her services in teaching music and languages could be accepted in exchange for her board and instruction in certain other things. Miss Cribb was willing enough to strike the bargain. Miss Balasso's musical abilities were

beginning to be recognized as remarkable by the virtuosi ; and, although neither popular nor pliable, she was able to make herself extremely useful. Then, having settled this matter without consulting any one, she told Major Maude what she had done. He could not help feeling some surprise at the swiftness and secrecy of the girl's course of action. It was striking to see such a young and inexperienced creature so self-reliant and resolute. But he fully recognized the value of those qualities to a girl in Enone's position. "I think you have acted rightly, Nona," he said. "It is fair and right that since you have the power to do so you should relieve the Czernovics of some of their responsibility on your behalf. And," he added, "I am sure you thought of them in making this arrangement."

"No," returned Enone, knitting her brows a little. "I did not think of them. I did not do it for their sake. As to responsibility—they have none. They can have none. They are just waifs and strays like myself, floating whither Fate wills. But you—you are different, I would not that you should be bound to pay money for me."

Maude had often thought that the only dark spot on Enone's moral nature was the in-

difference—almost insensibility—which she manifested about her obligations to the Czernovics. “It is so strange,” said Major Maude to himself, “for she is not ungrateful at heart. She is grateful enough—too grateful—to me, who have done so little for her. And yet she accepts all these poor people’s services as a matter of course!’

However, the peculiarities of poor CEnone’s character did not occupy his thoughts very long. He regarded her with the softness which he felt for all who were weak and helpless; and perhaps with some special tenderness of compassion which resulted from the benefits he had conferred on her. But her figure was a very subordinate one in his daily life, and stood in the background with a crowd of others, with whom it would have been gall and wormwood to the Greek girl to know herself associated in his mind.

But since her stay in Green Street, Maude’s opinion of CEnone’s judgment and heart had been considerably raised. She praised Mary Lowry! There was growing up in her secret soul a passionate, burning jealousy of Mary Lowry—for to her, Vincent Maude’s secret was no secret,—and yet she praised her;—praised her to him, warmly, fully, and ungrudg-

ingly. The exaggerated notions of her superiority in right of her Greek descent, which the forlorn child had fostered in the lonely, silent dreaming of her companionless life, had not been all evil in their effect on her character. Naturally generous and lofty-minded, her faults were chiefly those of ignorance and narrow circumstances. She did not claim her birthright of Greek supremacy without accepting the duties it entailed, as a baser nature might have done. Meanness, falsehood, cowardice, were not for her. She came of the race of the gods! Nay, she might be called upon to suffer more than mortals made of coarser clay. Well, if so, she would suffer bravely. Hitherto no strain had been put on her powers of endurance. The strain was coming, though. And she thought, in her young inexperience, and her fantastic pride, that she should be able to overcome temptation with superb heroism. Her seventeen-year-old imagination concerned itself mainly with the glow of combat and victory. It had not reckoned with the pain of slowly stiffening wounds, the humiliation of failure, the instinctive shrinking from repeated blows, which belong to all human struggle—even the bravest.

When she made that speech about Mary Lowry's thoughts shining in her face like sunlight through alabaster, Major Maude answered warmly, "Yes; that is just the idea she gives one. I have often felt it. But I could never have expressed it so poetically."

My lady, who was present, observed in a tone of majestic reproof, "Well, the truth is, that Miss Balasso does express herself poetically; it can't be denied. Sir Cosmo told her the other day that her talk was too high-flown to suit English people. She was a little angry with him at the time, but it *is* true, you know. Poetry, except in a book, sounds so silly! And I often say so to her, don't I, Miss Balasso?"

"Yes," replied Enone, gravely, "you often say so."

"Well, then, my dear, why don't you try to correct it? Major Maude will think you don't improve by being amongst us all. And I wish you to improve. I know you have been quite a benefactor to Miss Balasso, Major Maude. And, of course, you would like her to profit by the advantage of mixing with the society she sees at my house."

"You cannot mix antagonistic substances," observed Enone, quietly. "You may drag

them together, but they will never combine."

My lady stared and shook her head. "There!" she exclaimed, turning to Maude, "that's just what Sir Cosmo objects to so much—that funny kind of talk, not a bit like a young lady. She *is* such a queer girl!"

But Sarah had certain strong motives for wishing to keep Ænone Balasso in good humour, and she did not press her reproof any further. Two or three sittings had taken place since the occasion when Ænone was first mesmerized; and at these latter sittings no one had been present except Lady Lowry, Ænone, and Dr. Flagge. Ænone proved to be a wonderfully good subject, and made many statements during her mesmeric sleep which Sarah deemed highly important. These statements nearly all had reference to Sir Rupert Lowry, and encouraged the notions which Sarah had formed on the subject of his will. Indeed, it was observable that no sooner did Sarah, in her growing intimacy and confidence with Flagge, hint a suspicion than that suspicion was sure to be confirmed by the spirits at the next sitting. Still it was an undoubted fact that many minute details of Sir Rupert Lowry's character and habits



were accurately described by Ænone during the magnetic sleep. Sarah tested their truth by questioning her husband, and frequently had the satisfaction of seeing that Cosmo was surprised and puzzled by her questions. He would fain have dismissed the whole matter with the convenient formula, "Ah! more of that fellow Flagge's humbug!" But the correctness of the circumstances narrated was frequently so startling that he was unable to treat the subject with indifference or sneering incredulity. He did sneer, indeed, but he was neither indifferent nor wholly incredulous.

"Well," said he once to his wife, "granting, for the sake of argument, that all this is true, supposing that the spirits, black, red, white, or grey, do tell this little Balasso, or Flagge, or both, a number of facts about my father—what then? What is to come of it? What do you expect to get by it?"

"I expect," replied Sarah, with steady deliberation, "to find Sir Rupert Lowry's last will and testament; for the will that was read out by Mr. Flint after your father's funeral is *not* the last, and no power shall make me believe it is. That's what I expect to do; and I shan't flinch from my duty as a wife towards you—not to speak of another whose

claims may have to be considered some day. How could I look my child in the face, Cosmo, if I allowed him to be robbed of his birth-right?"

In reply to which Sir Cosmo recommended her to keep her expectations to herself, unless she wanted to be taken for a mad woman. Nevertheless, her unwearying persistence, and obstinate faith in her own opinion, influenced his mind more strongly than he himself was aware of. He began to speculate on the possible contents of a new will to be discovered by Dr. Flagge's agency. And he grew more and more discontented with the conditions of the existing one.

Then there arose another feeling to be added to the secret hopes, fears, jealousies, and unavowed motives of all sorts which estranged Cosmo and his wife more and more from Mary Lowry, and made them look upon her as one whose interests were opposed to their own. And it originated in a conversation which took place between Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry one evening, when they were alone in the library, where the former was smoking an after-dinner cigar. All at once he said to his wife, with more than usual petulance, "Why the deuce is Maude

always hanging about the house now? I have found him in the drawing-room three times this week. There is a little too much of this."

"Well, I'm sure, Cosmo, I don't know why you should dislike Major Maude being here. He's very agreeable in his manners. And I suppose he finds some attraction that makes him come. I won't deny that he admires me a good deal; of course in the most respectful way—highly so! But you needn't be jealous, Cosmo."

"Jealous! Don't talk d—d nonsense."

"Cosmo, I declare I shall believe you are jealous if you use such violent language. However, there is no need for you to be, I assure you. Major Maude likes ladies' society. He says so, and I dare say he doesn't like it less when the ladies don't happen to be frights or monsters. That's natural enough, and there's no harm in it. But I am not the woman to encourage the least approach to flirtation, Cosmo. I am aware that it is done in the higher circles. Mrs. Wigmore tells me they think nothing of it. But I do not approve of it myself. At the same time, I'm sure Major Maude is so extremely respectful and polite in his behaviour that——"

My lady stopped short in her flowing harangue. She had been talking in her own slow, steady, untiring way, like the current of a full, but sluggish, stream, when the tide was arrested by the expression of Sir Cosmo's face as he looked at her.

"Well?" said my lady, indignantly, "what are you looking like that for? I haven't said anything ridiculous, have I?"

"Since you do me the honour to ask me, I am bound to tell you that you have said something supremely ridiculous," replied Sir Cosmo, smiling sarcastically, and bending his black brows together at the same time.

"Well, I'm sure, Cosmo! You're very polite!"

"I'm very right; and I'm aware that that is sometimes far from polite. Why, Sally,—where are your eyes? I really thought women were quick at that sort of observation. But I suppose that notion is merely conventional humbug, like so much else. Don't you know that Maude comes here for my sister Mary? He's been over head and ears in love with her for years."

My lady's face expressed incredulity and amazement. Major Maude in love with Mary! The idea had never entered into

Sarah's head. She could scarcely believe it Cosmo must be mistaken.

"Major Maude in love with your sister for years past? Why, Mary never breathed a hint about it!"

"All the Lowrys are not so communicative as Sir Rupert's ghost, Sally."

"Cosmo, you ought not to talk like that. But how did you know? When was it?"

"Oh, Maude went down to Lowry as a— a sort of ambassador to my father when our little boy was born. It was Isabel's doing chiefly. And then he saw Mary. She was eighteen or nineteen, and wonderfully beautiful, and——"

"Well, I *can't* see that Mary is so beautiful. I never could. Her eyebrows being so much darker than her hair give her such a funny look."

"H'm! You know nothing at all about it. Mary Lowry was, and is, as handsome a woman as any in the three kingdoms. All the women of our family have been handsome. Maude was desperate about her. But directly my father found out what was going on, he sent him packing."

"Why?"

"Why? Do you suppose that Sir Rupert

would have dreamt for an instant of allowing Miss Lowry of Lowry to marry a fellow whose father kept a shop ? ”

“ Did Major Maude’s father keep a shop ? ”

“ Something of the sort. A shop, or a warehouse, or something. Anyway, he wasn’t quite the sort of match for Miss Lowry of Lowry, and I wonder he hadn’t the sense to see it himself. I told him plainly it wouldn’t do, when he said a word to me on the subject in Malta. He dropped it with me at once. But I believe that Isabel and her sister foolishly encouraged him, as women will do.’

“ Oh ! that Mrs. Peppiat encouraged it, did she ? It shows what dangerous people those Peppiats are to know ! And did Mary like him ? ”

“ Can’t say, I’m sure. I know that she sent back a letter he wrote to her after he left Lowry Place, because he brought it to me to ask if that were really my sister’s writing on the cover.”

“ And was it ? ”

“ Yes, it was. Mary writes a peculiar hand, not easily mistaken.”

“ Well, that ought to have been enough for him, if he had any proper spirit.”

“ It don’t seem to have been enough for

him, judging by the way he hangs about the house now."

"Do you feel quite, quite sure that he comes for Mary?"

"Who else can he come for? As to his coming for you—it's absurd."

There was so long a pause that Sir Cosmo had got through a leading article in the newspaper before Sarah said, "Should you like Mary to marry Major Maude?"

"Like it? Not exactly. I'm not ambitious of connecting myself with the noble race of Maudes. It's really uncommon presumption on Vincent Maude's part to think of such a thing. Miss Lowry of Lowry! H'm! There's nothing like flying high when you are about it."

"I," said Sarah, with a stolid plainness which was the quality by which she most powerfully influenced her husband, "I don't want Mary to marry at all! She's lived single so long, that she has come to be considered quite an old maid; and she ought to feel bound not to carry all that money out of the family. It's a religious duty; she ought to leave it to your children."

"H'm! If I had a dozen children—which Heaven forbid!—Mary wouldn't be likely to do

anything for any of them, unless, perhaps, for Rosamond."

"More shame for her, then! But even if she left her money to Rosamond, it would save your having to provide for her, and would be something gained. I say that Mary Lowry ought to consider it a religious duty to keep that money in the family. It's bad enough—a great deal too bad—that she should deprive us of it during her life. And then there's Lowry Place;—how should you like to see a stranger set up to be master in Lowry Place? And that's what would happen if Mary was to marry."

Sir Cosmo turned round and snapped at her almost fiercely. "What the devil is the use of worrying yourself about it?" he said. "At all events, I beg you won't worry me. Mary must do as she likes. There's no good in talking, if you talk for a twelvemonth; and, for my part, I don't intend to trouble my head on the subject any more."

Nevertheless, Sir Cosmo did trouble his head on the subject from that time forward.



## CHAPTER IV.

IF Lady Lowry had not so completely turned the cold shoulder to "those Peppiats," as she called them, she might have had some chance of being enlightened as to the actual source of much of the information which was furnished to her by Dr. Flagge's spirits. The Captain—to whom it was absolutely impossible to be reticent or prudent—talked about "that queer fish, Quickit," over his supper-table, and repeated Quickit's stories of the niggardly old baronet, and of Sir Rupert's connection with the Loan Society, to any one who would listen.

But of all that not a word reached my lady's ears. Ever since she had been enlightened by her husband as to Maude's old love story, she had displayed an increasing dislike to the very name of Peppiat; and she dreaded lest Mary and Major Maude should find opportunities of meeting in Nelson Place,

out of her ken. It was impossible for her to shut up Miss Lowry, or openly to control her actions. She might forbid Rosamond to visit her aunt and uncle, but Mary was free to see them whenever she pleased. Having once got the clue, Sarah had become convinced that the attraction which drew Major Maude to her house was, in truth, Mary Lowry. Not that my lady gave Maude credit for disinterested affection. She had a grudging jealousy of Mary, which made it very disagreeable to her to accept the conviction that the former was the object of a romantic passion, so she simply refused to accept it,—a convenient method of bringing facts into harmony with one's prejudices, but not attainable by all minds.

My lady set up the theory that Major Maude, having neither ancient lineage nor much money, desired to ally himself with a woman who possessed both. Opportunity caused him to select Miss Lowry of Lowry, and his chance was all the better with her because there had formerly been some youthful love passages between them; that was all. Sarah admitted it was not wonderful that Major Maude should try for such a prize. She felt little or no anger against Major

Maude. Having once established the assumption that Major Maude was not heartily in love with Mary, my lady found it easier to forgive him for seeking to marry her. Nevertheless she regretted that chance, or Mrs. Wigmore, or the spirits—or, perhaps, all three—had brought him to her house whilst Mary was in it. And yet, she reflected, it might have been worse; for they might have met elsewhere, out of her reach. As it was, she could exercise some supervision over them. She could at least watch them, and know what was going on; accordingly she did watch them, and, let Maude come when he would, he never found Miss Lowry unaccompanied by her sister-in-law. Formerly he and Rosamond and Mary had been permitted to enjoy many a half-hour without the honour of her ladyship's company; but now Lady Lowry suddenly showed a strong sense of her hospitable duties towards the Major, and never quitted the room for an instant so long as he remained in it.

Sarah was greatly puzzled by the simplicity of Mary's demeanour in Maude's presence. She found herself completely baffled in her efforts to discover what Mary's real feelings were towards him, and at length she resolved

to try the effect of awakening a little jealousy. In pursuance of this idea she took an early opportunity, when she and Mary were alone together, of saying she could not help noticing Major Maude's growing attentions to Miss Balasso; she hoped he was in earnest, and did not mean to trifle with the poor girl, but his manner to her was very particular. Didn't Mary think so? and had she remarked that the Major had positively haunted the house ever since Miss Balasso had been an inmate of it?

Mary's head had been bent over a book, but she raised it at once, and looked full at her sister-in-law as she answered, "I hope, Sarah, that you have not hinted anything of this sort to Enone? It would be cruel. I am convinced that Major Maude has no such feelings about her as you seem to think."

"Are you, really? But I am not at all convinced of it. I have eyes, and I watch them. How do you account for his manner?"

"His manner seems to me to be that of a kind, gentle, generous man towards a young girl whom he looks upon as little more than a child, and in whom he feels a compassionate interest."

"Ah! well, compassionate interest is all

very well, no doubt, but I don't believe in its making a man look and speak as the Major does, and hang round a girl day after day. As to considering her a child—she *isn't* a child, you know; and youth is a great attraction to most men. Seventeen has a better chance than seven and twenty, any day."

Mary grew a little pale, but her eyes looked clear and unfaltering into my lady's. Sarah went on:

"I'm sure if he doesn't think of her in that way he ought not to behave as he does; and why shouldn't he think of her? She has no money, but I suppose he has enough to keep a wife well enough for his station. He's a man of no family whatever, so it would be no come down for him as far as *that* goes. His father kept a shop."

"I think you are mistaken there," replied Mary. "Not that it matters."

"Oh, of course it doesn't matter to us, but it may matter to Miss Balasso. If he belonged to a high family it might be different; but seeing what his origin was, I do not consider it presumption on her part to try to catch him."

"Sarah, how can you use such an odious word?" cried Mary; and now the blood

flushed up hotly into her cheeks. "I am convinced that Enone has no such idea in her head. She is too pure-minded, and too proud."

"Too proud! La, Mary, what will you say next? A little twopenny teacher in a boarding school, and a foreigner, too—a girl that comes from nobody knows where, and belongs to nobody knows who—*proud*? Well, you may say what you please, but just watch her the next time the Major is here, and see if she don't sit and stare at him with those great saucer eyes of hers, all the time he is here."

Mary was more disturbed by this conversation than she liked to acknowledge to herself. She told herself at first that Sarah's suspicion was the common suspicion of a vulgar mind, and that it was entirely erroneous; and yet, by-and-by, many little circumstances began to haunt her memory, and to make her uneasy. Enone made no secret of her gratitude to Maude. If she showed less sensibility than was becoming to the good offices of the Czernovics, she certainly acknowledged Major Maude's benefits with the deepest feeling. Mary fully acquitted her of the coarse design which Lady Lowry had coarsely expressed, but she recognized the passionate temperament lying hid beneath Enone's silent re-

serve. The girl was young, inexperienced, romantic. Might it not be that she was cherishing a day-dream about Vincent Maude, and laying up to herself stores of sorrow and mortification?

But then, later, arose another thought. Was it so certain that CEnone's day-dream was destined to disappointment? Might it not be that Maude was attracted by the girl in the way that Sarah fancied? Although her whole heart cried out "No," yet she found herself continually pondering this question. It presented itself to her mind with distressing importunity again and again. But whatever conclusion she reached in these mental debates, that conclusion was almost certain to be shaken the next time she saw Vincent and CEnone together. This unshared anxiety, this harassing fluctuation between hopes and fears, grew almost a torment. She was ashamed of herself, and that was a new and very intolerable feeling for Mary Lowry. She was conscious that the words dropped from my lady's heedless tongue—she believed it to have been heedless—had changed her manner towards Maude, and that, struggle as she would, she could not regain her old sweet serenity in his presence. She had believed that he came to

her brother's house to seek her ; she had believed that the romance of her youth might have a second spring-time, and blossom anew. She had never wavered in her faith to him, and although there had been a time when she thought she had buried hope, yet at the first glance of Vincent Maude's eyes, as they rested on her, she had felt that hope had not been dead, but only chilled into stillness like a frost-bound flower, and that it stirred and woke at the sight of her old love ; now there was a bitter flavour which spoiled the sweetness of his presence ; the sensitive chord of womanly dignity had been roughly jarred, and it would not cease from quivering. Had vanity blinded her to the truth ? Had she too readily assumed that Maude's heart had been as her own during all the years of separation, and was she with foolish self-complacency accepting for herself the devotion meant for another ? She resolved that she would not be guilty of the weakness of giving more weight to Sarah's judgment in this matter than she would have attributed to it had the case concerned any other person than herself. She made this resolution, and honestly tried to keep it, but the bitter flavour was there, the insidious word had been spoken, and the aspect of many



things was changed and darkened for Mary Lowry.

Nevertheless my lady was by no means aware of the amount of her own success. To her mind the result of Mary's believing that her former suitor was now inclined to be the suitor of CEnone Balasso should naturally have been to make Mary dislike the latter; but, so far as my lady's observation went, Mary appeared to treat the girl with more tenderness and consideration than before. True, Mary might be acting; but yet, what need was there of acting before Miss Balasso? Miss Balasso had neither money, station, nor friends. It would have been only natural, Sarah thought, to be quite unconstrained in the expression of any disagreeable sentiments towards *her*! But then presently Sarah found herself in the position of seeing that which she had uttered as a fiction for purposes of her own, begin to take shape as a fact. Having given up the fancy that Major Maude's attention and admiration were entirely concentrated on herself (reserving, however, the soothing conviction that they would be so concentrated, if only his interests did not interfere with his inclinations), my lady's eyes were opened to observe much which had before escaped

her, and, to her surprise and not unmingled satisfaction, she began to perceive that Eñone Balasso did sit and gaze at Maude whenever he was present, like a spell-bound creature. She was never forward or demonstrative; but it was certain that from some modest corner apart she would watch him, and treasure every word he spoke, and could remember to a syllable what he had said on such and such a subject, and knew his likings and dislikings, and consciously or unconsciously adopted his opinions.

Now, one of Major Maude's opinions was that Dr. Flagge was wholly untrustworthy, and a man with whom anything like intimacy ought to be discouraged. This opinion had never, perhaps, been distinctly stated by Maude in Lady Lowry's house, but it had made itself felt; and when the circumstance of Eñone's having been mesmerized by Flagge was mentioned to him, Major Maude at once made a strong remonstrance against any repetition of that proceeding.

"Dear me," said my lady, "I can't think why you should object! It does Miss Balasso no harm."

"I don't think it good that a man like Flagge should obtain influence over Nona."

"Nor do I," said Miss Lowry.

"Oh, as to you, Mary, we know that you hate Dr. Flagge! But I should have thought Major Maude would be more liberal, because he has seen a good deal of mediums and spirits. And I'm sure—at least in my house—Dr. Flagge's spirits never utter any but the most proper sentiments."

My lady was very angry. She resented Maude's interference, even although the interference only amounted to an expression of opinion. What business was it of his? The worst was that Enone would infallibly be influenced by Maude's objection to her being mesmerized, if she were made aware of it. Perhaps she would decline to be present at the sittings altogether, which would be highly inconvenient; for, as my lady said to herself, the spirits who knew all about Sir Rupert seemed to utter their communications by means of Miss Balasso better than in any other way.

She hinted her anxieties to Dr. Flagge the next time he came to Green Street.

"Miss Nony can't refuse to be mesmerized," said Flagge, with a smile which was not a pleasant one.

"Oh, you don't know the influence Major

Maude has over her ! And Miss Lowry, too. And they've both set themselves against it quite strongly ; and Miss Balasso can be very stiff and self-willed, though she does look such a poor creature that you might blow her away, almost."

"I didn't say Miss Nony won't refuse ; I said she *can't* refuse," returned Flagge, still with the same smile.

"How do you mean ? "

"I mean that if I choose to put her into the magnetic sleep she can't resist me ; I have acquired considerable of a power over her."

"What—against her will ? " stammered Sarah, looking rather frightened.

"She hasn't got to have any will when she's in my presence—not without I choose to let her."

"Oh, la ! but that sounds almost awful, Dr. Flagge ! "

"Well, a good many natural facts are rather awful, Lady Lowry ; anyway, I'm not responsible for 'em ; I'm but an instrument for carrying of 'em out."

There was a pause. Then Sarah said, "If we could *persuade* Miss Balasso, I should prefer it. I—I—don't think I should like to

have her mesmerized against her will. I'm afraid it would be wicked."

"That depends on what you want to mesmerize her for. I reckon your motives are pure, high-minded, and lofty?"

"Oh yes," answered Sarah, naïvely. "Of course! But—if anything should happen to her,—if she was to get ill, or anything,—or to tell people,—it *wouldn't* look well, you know."

There was always a latent assumption in Sarah's mind that not to "look well," and to be wicked, were nearly equivalent to each other.

"It might be possible to do without her altogether," said Flagge. "I can't say. But if it isn't possible to do without her, I expect you'll have to decide about taking the responsibility of what's to be done. I believe I'm on the track of a very important discovery."

"Oh! What?"

"Well, I don't know as I'm justified in stating it just yet: not without Sir Rupert Lowry's leave, anyway. He was with me last night at a late hour, and we had a very interesting time."

"Do you know," said Sarah, after a short silence, during which she had been staring at

the medium with flushed cheeks, and a general air of ponderous excitement—if the phrase may be permitted—“Do you know that sometimes it comes over me as if it *couldn't be* all true about the spirits. Things do fall out so astonishing!” Here she clasped her hands tightly together. “It’s almost like you feel in a dream sometimes—real and not real. To think of the spirits going on as they do, and saying what they say—it *is* so wonderful that I sometimes can hardly believe in it—there!”

“The feeling you describe is very usual, lovely lady,” answered Flagge quietly, “especially in the early stages of experience. The human mind, in its carnal development, revolts against transcendental phenomena. It is a phase which most embodied intellects have got to pass through. But you’re continually liable to fall back into it. It’s one of the conditions of our imperfect terrestrial existence. And the fact is that the manifestations *are*, as you say, so wonderful, that I sometimes can hardly believe in ’em myself.”

## CHAPTER V.

It was more than two months since Mary Lowry had arrived in her brother's house. She had reached London on the 17th of September, and it was now close upon the end of November. She had been for some time past considering what arrangement it would be possible for her to make as to her future life, and which of all the possible arrangements would be the best. It became more and more clear to her that her brother's house could be in no sense a home for her. She had looked forward to the happiness of companionship, to the secure sense of love and trust needing no expression in words to make itself felt, to the sweet familiar intercourse, which made the atmosphere of a happy home more genial than that of any other place on earth. But in Cosmo's house she had found none of these things. And she had now

assured herself that they would never be found there.

Life was slipping away—swiftly, swiftly. It seemed to her that the six months which had elapsed since her father's death had made a longer stage in the march of time than the six years which had preceded it. The feeling came upon her, which comes to most of us sooner or later, that she must seize on some of the golden grains of life which were running away like the sand in an hour-glass, and feel them in her grasp, not idly watch them fall and dwindle till the last fragment should be irrevocably lost. It was not selfish enjoyment that she craved for. She would give those golden grains of time to serve others at their need; but she desired that at least the gift should be given consciously, and of her own free will. As it was, the hours of her life seemed to fall dully, drop by drop, like water on a barren rock, and she saw neither use nor pleasure spring from them.

Of course this feeling was intermittent. She did not sit and brood over it day after day. But it came frequently enough to depress her spirits. And her wish to make some change in the tenor of her life grew very strong.



She had said a word to Cosmo and Sarah about their going down to Lowry Place for the Christmas time ; but they had both declared it to be out of the question. Mary would fain have passed Christmas in her old home, even although she had to pass it alone. There would be the familiar scenes which had woven themselves into her life. There would be the old servants, and the old dog. She might feel melancholy there ; but it would be a melancholy full of gentle thoughts and tender sorrow. In Cosmo's house she not only suffered from that worst loneliness, want of sympathy, but she was tormented by feeling herself in constant antagonism to the characters of those around her. She would, however, force herself to remain in her brother's house until after Christmas ; but then she was resolved she would leave it—at least for a time.

In the last days of November she got a letter from Mr. Flint, which she answered as follows :—

“ Green Street,

“ November 30th, 187—

“ DEAR MR. FLINT,

“ The sight of your handwriting was as welcome to me as the face of an old friend.

I must put duty before pleasure, and answer the business part of it first. As regards the proposition you mention for taking Lowry Place on lease, I have thought of it as carefully as I could, and have decided to decline it. My father bequeathed the old house to me in order that I might have a home among the people who know me, and whom I know. I appreciate better than I did his motives for doing so. I certainly have ample means without that to provide myself with a suitable dwelling elsewhere, if that were all, and if the shelter of one roof were as good as another. But it is not so—at least, not for me. I think, too, that I might be more useful to others at Lowry than anywhere else. And I wish to be useful if I can attain to so much happiness before it is too late. I begin to feel quite an old woman! No; dear Mr. Flint, I do not like the thought of strangers inhabiting the old house. If my brother would live there it would be different. Perhaps some arrangement may be come to between Cosmo and me which will result in his taking up his abode at Lowry for at least a portion of the year. I will abide by the terms which you have counselled me to propose, knowing, as I do, that you understand the position of affairs,

and understand us. I think that is all that need be said on business at present. I am delighted at the hope you hold out to me of seeing Mrs. Flint in London before long. Pray beg her to let me know her address in town, and the time of her arrival. I hope you will be able to accompany her, if but for a few days. My present plan is to remain here up to the end of December, and then I think I shall come home for a while. I long for home. I shall ask Cosmo to let Rosamond accompany me. She is a sweet-natured, honest-hearted girl, and I have come to love her very dearly. She reminds me often, in certain turns of expression and tricks of face—and especially in her thorough simplicity and candour—of my dear mother, whom you and Mrs. Flint remember well. Rosamond has not quite my mother's soft gentleness, but she is very affectionate. I am well; but I fear I have become too completely a country mouse to be quite at my ease in town. I long for Clevelen Woods, bare and leafless though they must be now; and for a wide stretch of sky, even though it be cloudy, and for the cawing of the rooks, and all the country sounds that seem as sweet and wholesome to my ears as the country air does to my lungs. A thou-

sand thanks for the details you give me about Lowry Place. I am glad that all is going well there. Will you kindly let the servants know that I asked for them? And pray pat poor old Con for me, and tell him he will soon see his mistress again. I know he will understand quite well. I should have asked leave to bring him here with me, but Lady Lowry dislikes dogs. Give my love to Mrs. Flint, and believe me,

“ Dear Mr. Flint,

“ Yours always, with sincere regard,

“ MARY H. LOWRY.”

“ Miss Lowry is not happy in London,” said Mr. Flint to his wife, when he had read this letter.

“ Of course not! How should she be happy with such a person as the present Lady Lowry?” returned Mrs. Flint.

“ I’m not sure that Lady Lowry is chiefly responsible for her not being happy. That brother of hers has turned out a complete disappointment. Hollow as a drum. Not a particle of heart or feeling about him.”

“ She seems to be fond of Rosamond.”

“ Yes; that’s some comfort. Oh yes; when Mary Lowry says the girl reminds her of her

mother, we may be sure that she has taken her into her heart."

"What do you think of her refusal to let Lowry Place, Samuel?"

"I think—I think she's right, on the whole. And I am glad to find she is willing to abide by my advice as to the bargain to be made with her brother. If she let him and his family into Lowry Place without a distinct contract being made, it would end in her being shouldered out of her own house. Sir Cosmo Lowry can't be treated with generous confidence. His mental constitution requires much harder diet."

"Well, Samuel, but he comes of the old stock, after all. For my part, I should say that the person most to blame is that low-born woman he has married."

"I wish Miss Lowry would get married herself! That would be the best thing that could happen."

"Ah, Samuel, that *would* be a good thing. And why she doesn't I can't imagine. So handsome as she is, so well-born, such an amiable character, and, now, such a good dower—I can't think what the men are about!"

"I wonder if there's any one she cares for."

"I should think she might pick and choose the county through."

"Do you remember, Bertha, long ago—ten or twelve years ago—a man coming down to Lowry, a handsome fellow, who was in the army?"

"Y—yes; I do remember. I only saw him once, though. What of him?"

"I fancy—I can scarcely tell how I first took up the idea—but I fancy that he fell in love with Miss Lowry."

"Not a very strange fancy either!"

"No. But I fancy, moreover, that she was at least very well inclined to fall in love with him."

"La, Samuel!"

"Of course, it is merely a conjecture. One evening, soon after Sir Rupert's death, when I was talking with Miss Lowry, some word she said gave me a sort of glimpse of it all. I began to recall half-forgotten circumstances, and I gradually recollected how it was that he came to Lowry. He brought letters of introduction from some officer of high rank whom Sir Rupert had known in his youth. And he was well received at first. But then it presently turned out that he was a friend of Cosmo's, and had come to negotiate a reconciliation between father and son. He brought the news of the birth of Mrs. Cosmo's first

boy. I suppose she had fancied, poor thing, that the birth of an heir would soften the old man. But it all came to nothing. The man—I cannot think of his name, I should know it if I heard it—went away after a week or two, and Sir Rupert spoke angrily about him. I thought at the time that that was merely because he had come as a friend of Cosmo's. But I am inclined to think now that Sir Rupert had other reasons for taking such a dislike to the young man."

Mrs. Flint was greatly interested in all this. But, as she said, even supposing there had been some youthful love-making long ago between Mary Lowry and this stranger, that need not prevent her marrying now. "She ought to make a great match," Mrs. Flint said.

"She writes here about feeling herself to be old," said Mr. Flint, balancing Mary's letter in his hand.

"Parcel of stuff and nonsense! I hate to hear such trash. That has been put into her head by that horrid Lady Lowry, I'll warrant. Oh yes, it would suit her very well to keep Mary Lowry an old maid, no doubt. I always told you from the first, Samuel, that that young woman would be a thorn in Miss Lowry's side."

Mr. Flint pshaw'd and shrugged, and bade his wife not make giants in order to kill them; but nevertheless it did seem to him not unlikely that some such scheme as Mrs. Flint hinted at might be floating in my lady's brain.

He wrote back at once to Miss Lowry, warmly approving her plan of returning home for a time, and promising her a hearty welcome from all Clevelen folk, high and low, not forgetting her friends at Elcaster. "I really believe Con did understand your message," he wrote. "His spirits have decidedly improved since I gave it him."

Excited by the prospect of Miss Lowry's return home Mrs. Flint lost no time in calling a mental muster-roll of all the men in the neighbourhood who could be considered eligible matches for Mary. And after a careful balancing of advantages and disadvantages, she selected two possible candidates to whom she was willing to give her vote and interest. One was a neighbouring landowner of fine property, unimpeachable pedigree, and unblemished character. The other was the Earl of Elcaster. "The Elcasters can't boast of very old blood," said Mrs. Flint to herself, "but—an Earl is an Earl. And he is so enormously rich that he will be sure to care



more for pedigree than cash—not to mention that Miss Lowry is the handsomest woman in the county.”

But when she hinted these schemes to her husband, Mr. Flint answered her almost crossly. “Lord Elcaster? You’re crazy, Bertha! He’s a fool—or, at least, an ignoramus. He knows nothing except horses, and not enough of them to help losing his money by them.”

“He can afford to lose his money. The Elcasters are rich enough to buy all the race-horses in England if they liked.”

“My dear Bertha, you had better put that nonsense out of your head. Lord Elcaster is spending—well, never mind.”

“I *should* like to see Miss Lowry a Countess!” said Mrs. Flint with a little sigh.

“Wouldn’t you like better to see her happy with a man she could really love?”

“Of course, Samuel, I should wish her to love her husband. But why shouldn’t she love an Earl?”

Mr. Flint withdrew to his office without proffering any reply to that query. To be sure, there did not seem to be any reason why, other things being equal, Miss Lowry should not love an Earl. But then, the only Earl

within reach was not lovable—or, at all events, he was persuaded that Mary Lowry would not think him so.

Meanwhile, when Mary told her sister-in-law that she intended to go home after Christmas, and expressed a wish to take Rosamond with her, she was surprised to find the proposition received with evident disfavour. She did not flatter herself that Sarah was pained at the idea of parting from her on any grounds of personal attachment. But it was clear that for some reason Sarah did not wish her to go away.

“I can’t understand what you want to go to Lowry for in this weather,” said my lady.

“I fear it might be difficult for me to make you understand. I am a little home-sick. I believe that is the truth.”

“Well, I should have thought you might feel your brother’s house to be home!”

“You are very kind.”

Sarah was a little disconcerted to find what she had intended for a sneer received with grave politeness. After a pause she resumed: “And I’m sure there can be nothing on earth for you to do at Lowry.”

“But suppose I would rather do nothing at Lowry than do nothing elsewhere?”

"I can't make it out," returned Sarah, with perfect truth and some temper.

Sir Cosmo's remark on the subject was, "I suppose Mary is tired of us. I dare say she don't find Green Street a very pleasant residence."

"Well, I'm sure! Why shouldn't she?"

Sir Cosmo responded merely by a prolonged sniff.

"I see no reason why she should not find it pleasant," continued my lady doggedly. "None at all. We live in much better style than your father kept up at Lowry. She has society. There are the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Wigmore! His brother is a lord, and even Mary can't say to the contrary. And as to servants, I don't know where she would find a butler like Lobley; I don't indeed."

"There are clearly all the elements of happiness! And if Mary don't appreciate them it's her own fault."

"Quite her own fault. But I hope you won't give leave for Rosamond to go to Lowry with her. She has taken a great fancy to Rosamond, and perhaps if we keep Rosamond here, Mary may stay too."

"Why the—mischief—do you want her to stay? You don't love her too dearly!"

"I want to have her under my own eye," replied my lady deliberately. "Once she's off to the country, there'll be all sorts of people ready to catch hold of her—that Mr. Flint and his wife, and who knows how many besides? We shall have her marrying and setting up a master in Lowry Place, mark my words!"

Some spark was struck even out of Cosmo's cold metal by this flinty hardness.

"Good God, Sarah," he cried, "do you suppose I'm going to play jailer over my sister? If she wishes to marry she has a right to do so, and let her, with all my heart! Only I don't know where there's a man worthy of her. It isn't every one who appreciates Mary. There are creatures that pearls are wasted on."

Lady Lowry, albeit curiously protected by Nature from many strokes calculated to wound the feelings, had her vulnerable points. She now had recourse to tears. It was not often that she was driven to this extreme measure, but now she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to cry. She did not sob with violence, but her eyelids and nose grew red, and the tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.

"That's the return I get for looking after the interests of my family, Cosmo," she said from behind her pocket-handkerchief. "I am aware that your sister despises me, but I don't think you ought to. And—and—in my delicate state I think you might show me some consideration."

Sir Cosmo was so accustomed to his wife's stolid way of passing over his roughest and sharpest speeches, that it came upon him almost with a sense of injury, to find her taking any of them to heart. Nevertheless he did not like to see the little woman cry; nor was he insensible to the reason she gave for some special consideration being due to her just then.

"I suppose you want to make me out a brute, Sally," he said. He spoke awkwardly, and almost gruffly, but Sarah understood very well that her husband was pensive to her tears. And she understood, too, that, notwithstanding his gruffness, he felt, if not contrite, at least uncomfortable.

Now, those who knew him well might be quite sure that the mortal who had the power to make Sir Cosmo feel uncomfortable, and from whom Sir Cosmo could not get away, would chiefly rule Sir Cosmo's life.


"You mustn't ask me to put in my oar, Sally woman," he said after a little while. "But if you don't mind taking it upon yourself to refuse leave for Rosamond to go to Lowry, you can do as you please. Only don't bother me. I can't interfere. You women must settle it amongst yourselves."

"Oh, I shan't at all mind taking upon myself to refuse," replied my lady.

And, to do her justice, she had the courage of her convictions.

## CHAPTER VI.

MR. CASSIUS DEMAYNE had had dealings in his day with the Castor and Pollux Loan Society. He had been an actor in country towns under a feigned name, and had had recourse to Castor and Pollux for the means of taking a journey from London to the North of England, and of living after the journey, until Saturday should come round, and bring with it the payment of thirty-five shillings sterling as his weekly salary. Mr. Cassius Demayne was not fond of alluding to those days. He would fain have drowned them altogether in the waters of oblivion. But there were persons who knew that part of his history, and with whom, therefore, he thought it best to speak freely of his unsuccessful efforts in the theatrical line. When he did speak of them, he always exaggerated both his own artistic failure and the miserable quality and circumstances of the troop he had performed with. He had



that form of vanity—not very uncommon, if you will observe a little—which prefers to make a strong effect of *any* kind rather than make no effect at all. One may often see persons who are willing to purchase the undivided attention of the company they are in, even at the cost of putting themselves in a ludicrous light, if by no other means can such attention be purchased. There is probably lurking in their minds an idea that the abiding impression left upon their hearers will be rather admiration of their wit, sense of humour, and so forth, than any sentiment akin to contempt. But perhaps the experiment is a dangerous one to make frequently; for, if it be not true that the world will take us absolutely at our own valuation, it nevertheless remains pretty certain that the world will not insist on pricing us higher than we price ourselves.

However, in the case of Mr. Cassius De-  
mayne, it must be owned that he balanced  
matters tolerably fairly. For while freely  
admitting that he had failed as an actor, he  
more than insinuated that this was owing to  
his superior birth and breeding, which were  
clearly superfluous in a profession requiring  
merely natural abilities. In confidence, and



with the most perfect regard for the capital fellows in the profession with whom he was on excellent terms of comradeship, Mr. Demayne would own to you that he did not think it possible for a thoroughbred gentleman to become a successful player. But there was an odd circumstance which made the whole case amusingly paradoxical ; namely, that the one strong desire, the secret and devouring ambition of Mr. Cassius Demayne's soul, was to play Benedick on the London stage. Meanwhile he earned his bread, with a fair share of butter on it, as treasurer in a fashionable theatre. And though he could not act himself, he was a very severe and astonishingly acute critic of those who could—one of the numerous instances of that curious perversity of Fate, which decrees that the people who best know how a thing ought to be done are so very seldom able to do it.

His attempts to act had brought him into the clutches of Castor and Pollux, and earned him a squeeze or two from their mailed fingers. On the other hand, the occupation of keeping accounts, and paying out little heaps of money every Saturday in a close room tapestried with play-bills, gave him wherewithal to live comfortably, and to keep

clear of those sharp practitioners who lend moneys on usury. Still, he occasionally saw Mr. Quickit, who boasted a taste for the drama, and had a rather wide acquaintance among a miscellaneous tribe of public performers whom he spoke of as "professionals."

Dr. Flagge had once met Demayne in Mr. Quickit's back parlour, and he had struck up an acquaintance with him. Demayne affected an almost unlimited catholicity in his acceptance of associates. "I, too, am a denizen of Bohemia," he said, speaking of some actor of the "poor devil" species. "And if one goes to settle in a country, one ought to consort with the inhabitants, and adopt their manners and customs."

"Why, yes; and it comes cheaper, too," returned Flagge, with perfect appreciation of all that was implied in Demayne's little speech about being a settler in Bohemia, and not to the manner born. "When I lived among the Appanawchees, it didn't cost me much for clean shirts."

After that, Dr. Flagge invited Mr. Demayne to his rooms, and regaled him with Bourbon whiskey and very special cigars.

The other guests present were Papa Czernovic and Bob Doery. Now, one might have

thought the members of this company little likely to interest themselves in such matters as spiritual manifestations. Yet the fact was that Flagge found his marvellous narratives eagerly listened to by them. Demayne was gradually led on to relate a story of a ghost which haunted his family ;—your family ghost has a flavour of respectability and antiquity, and is as genteel a hereditary evil as the gout ;—and Papa Czernovic told of some singular Moldavian superstitions, in which he was evidently a firm believer. Mr. Quickit, after contradicting everybody all round, admitted that he never could see the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* without a thrill of terror. And he added that he was inclined to think Shakespeare knew what he was about when he introduced supernatural agents into so many of his plays. “ Ghosts, you see,” said Mr. Quickit, rubbing his hands, “ ghosts are mixed up with human nature, ha, ha, ha ! Now, the immortal bard knew something about human nature, gentlemen. I don’t undertake to say positively that there are such things as ghosts, you understand ; but I’ll stake my head on this,—that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of us believe in ’em ! ”

"I don't believe in 'em," said Robert Doery, sturdily.

"Oh yes, you do! Oh yes, yes, yes, Mr. Doery, ha! ha! ha! To be sure, to—be sure! You may think you don't, but you do."

"Not a bit of it. I never did. I've no taste for wonders. I never cared for cock-and-a-bull stories even when I was a little chap."

"Aha! no? Dat is bat, my dear Mr. Bobby, very bat!" said Papa Czernovic.

"Bad or good, it's true. But I don't think it's bad not to like being humbugged."

"Ah, but my dear Mr. Bobby, it is not good for de artist to despise de vonderfool. No; de vonderfool is de life of de artist."

"Ah! Well, I ain't going to swallow a lot of old wives' tales."

"Look here, my dear Mr. Bobby, I am old, and I have seen many *menschen* and much places. And I have washed dem all wiz my eyes. Ja! Now, I tell to you dat if you did love de vonderfool what you can't understand,—I don't say exactly *belief* it wiz your cold head, but *love* it like de *kinder*, de little children do,—you would paint more better pictures. Even when he paint a stool and a table, it is better for de artist dat he love de vonderfool!"

"Hear, hear, Mr. Churneywig!" cried Quickit. "Very good, ha, ha! Ve—ry good!"

"Oh, that's all gammon," said Bob, a little nettled. "I know what that kind of talk means. If you can paint a stool and a table as they really are, you needn't bother yourself about the wonderful."

"But tables as dey really is isn't art, my dear Mr. Bobby!" said Papa Czernovic, excitedly. "If we was to sing de Moldavian melodies as dey really is—*ach bewahre!* You would fill up your ears with woollen!"

"Well, I know which is the most difficult, a jolly sight! A chair out of perspective might be more 'wonderful' than a chair in perspective, perhaps. But a child with a slate could do the one, and it takes some training and industry to accomplish the other."

"It's rather a big subject, Bob, and I don't think you and Herr Czernovic will quite settle it to-night," said Demayne.

"Anyhow, I reckon the wonderful ain't to be talked away," observed Flagge. "It's hovering around us, and above us, and inside of us——"

"And below us, eh?" put in Mr. Quickit.

"And below us. Yes, sir. And we've got to talk a pretty considerable amount before

'we're a going to eliminate the wonderful out of the universe ! "

" Well, but, Dr. Flagge, I suppose you don't believe all you hear of these spirit-tappings, tippings, and tomfoolery, yourself ! " said Doery. " You're not so soft now, are you ? Come ! "

" There are impostors," said Flagge, with cool candour.

" I should think there were, too ! "

" But their imposture is founded on facts—spiritual facts. If there was nothing to imitate there'd be no imitators."

" Oh, I don't know that I quite go with you there ! " said Mr. Quickit. " No ; I don't feel so sure about that. If people will open their mouths for humbug, humbug will drop into their mouths. It's the one thing that may always be had for asking. Ha, ha, ha ! "

" Humbug won't do what I've seen done, Mr. Quickit.—Just ring the bell for some more hot water, won't you, Doery ? Try another cigar, Mr. Demayne. They ain't just the best I ever did smoke, but they're pretty fair.—Humbug won't float a human body seven foot from the floor, across a room in full lamp-light. At least, if any gentleman present is acquainted with the receipt for that 'humbug,'

I shall be happy to deal with him for it. I expect it would pay."

"Do you mean to say you've seen that, Dr. Flagge?" asked Doery.

"Guess I don't 'mean to say' any more'n I'm asked to, on the subject."

"Oh, but I'm asking, you know. I want to know."

"It wouldn't be any good to tell you what I've seen. It never is. Folks must see for themselves."

"Well, I wish I could, but somehow, I never can. I remember once at Huddersfield, when I was a little lad of twelve years old, a travelling mesmerist gave a lecture in the theatre. He had a clairvoyant, as they call it, with him. But, you know, it was all humbug. It was found out afterwards."

"That was humbug, too, was it? Well, I'd like the receipt, as I said before, for a humbug that'd make a person in the magnetic sleep describe things he never saw nor heard of in his waking condition!"

"Have you ever mesmerized any one who did that?"

"Well, I have known it occur under my influence. Yes."

"Where was it? In London?"

Flagge gave a quick look at old Czernovic, who was listening attentively. "No, it was not in London. It was way off among the Appanawchees," said he, gravely.

"Oh!"

"Did you not once mesmerize Nona?" asked Czernovic. "I dink she once say you mesmerize her, eh?"

"Who? Oh, that Greek young girl? Well, I don't know, but I may," answered Flagge, puffing out a thick cloud of smoke, and staring fixedly at the opposite wall.

"Was that Miss Balasso?" said Bob, eager to catechize. "I know Miss Balasso. I met her at Captain Peppiat's. Did you really mesmerize Miss Balasso?"

"I have mesmerized a good many people in my time. Take some more whisky and water."

But Bob would drink no more. And after making one or two attempts to cross-question Flagge, and finding him grown suddenly uncommunicative, the young man rose to go away.

"I come too, upstairs," said Papa Czernovic; "I go wiz you, my dear Mr. Bobby."

"I'm off to the theatre, sir," said Bob, buttoning his overcoat. "There's a night



rehearsal of the pantomime after the play, and I want to see the effect of the 'Meads of Asphodel,' with the gas full on."

"Aha! Dat is very good. Ja. Don't despise de vonderfool, my dear young friend, eh?"

"We shall be as wonderful as we can for the money," replied Bob. "Dutch metal and red foil make a grand effect at a distance. And, between you and me, the wonderful never ought to be looked at too close."

When Doery and Czernovic were gone, the other two made some show of taking their leave also; but Flagge pressed them to stay with hospitable warmth. "What's the hurry?" he said. "I guess you've nothing to do just now, Quickit. And if Mr. Demayne hasn't either, I don't see why we shouldn't see the end of the bottle."

Then he made up a roaring fire, drew the table nearer to it, replenished the tumblers with grog, and bade his guests make themselves comfortable.

"Queer old card, Czernovic," observed Demayne, lighting a fresh cigar.

"He's an original, is Churneywig," said Mr. Quickit. "He's seen an immense deal of the world—an—*im-mense*—deal! I don't

know where he hasn't been, and he knows a little of everything."

"Yes; there's amusing elements in the character of our friend Czernovic. And romantic elements," said Flagge.

"Humph! He don't look romantic," remarked Demayne drily.

"Well, sir; that's a fact. He does not look romantic. But there is a highfalutin element in Czernovic. There mostly is in Germans, far's I know."

"But Churneywig isn't a German," said Quickit. "Oh, dear, no; ha, ha, ha! Not at all so!"

"A Moldo-Wallachian, eh?" said Demayne.

"By no means! By *no* means. He is, I understand, a Russian by birth. His mother was a German. His father was—what is it they call it?—Sclavonic, eh? Ha, ha, ha! his name is queer, isn't it? Oh, Churneywig is a cosmopolitan party, out and out. As queer a fish as I ever came across; and I've known a few queer fishes in my time. Oh dear, yes!"

"Oh, as to queer fishes, I've a pretty large experience in that way myself. I don't suppose many men are as well acquainted with the back slums of Europe as I am!"

There was always considerable likelihood that when Demayne got (conversationally) into the back slums of Europe, he would linger there. And, indeed, he forthwith began to wander about in that unsavoury labyrinth with singular gusto. As Flagge let him proceed for some time without interruption, a result presently followed which that acute individual had foreseen; namely, that Mr. Quickit was stimulated, by emulation and grog, to narrate sundry strange experiences of his own. Flagge watched them both attentively, and threw in a word or two now and then, as a bait to encourage Quickit in his revelations. This had to be done with caution. But Quickit was made expansive beyond his wont by Bourbon whisky. There is, besides, a contagion in garrulity which few men can resist. Against Demayne's Continental adventures, Quickit matched experiences of the London loan office. And, looking at the dialogue as a mere game of brag, he did not come off second best. The strangest of strange things with foreign names and surroundings, was surpassed by the strangeness of strange things in the midst of our everyday life, unknown and unsuspected. It is, after all, more immediately impressive to be told that Smith's

shop, where we bought cheese and butter yesterday, has been burnt down, than to read of a whole village swallowed up by the latest South American earthquake. The imaginations of few of us are so strong on the wing as not to be sensible of the difference between one mile and a thousand.

In order to compete with Mr. Quickit in interest, Demayne ought to have restricted his flights to Soho, or the purlieus of the metropolitan theatres. But instead of that, he rambled on about Vienna, which was very flat after the local melodramas of Castor and Pollux; and, finally, Mr. Quickit decisively took the lead and kept it.

“Oh, Lord bless you, the people I’ve come in contact with in that parlour downstairs, would amaze you! Our transactions, to be sure, are chiefly with the sort of persons that I call small fry, ha, ha, ha! Small fry, you know; but bigger fish have nibbled now and then. Lady’s maids, now—you’ve no idea of the lady’s maids that have come here on behalf of their mistresses. Why, sir, we have advanced cash to get diamonds out of pawn to go to Court with; just got out for the day, and put back next day. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Pretty expensive kind of business, that,

Mr. Quickit? I suppose Castor and Pollux didn't forget to make them pay for their diamonds?"

"Not at all, sir. I think we did it dirt cheap, all things considered. Then there was the baronet, sir; the baronet that lodged in these very rooms,—these i-dentical apartments. Why, he could walk into Her Majesty's Drawing Room, and was hand and glove with the nobility. And yet a relation of his—the circumstance only came out the other night—came to borrow twenty pound of us!—which wasn't twenty, either, by the time he got it. Came to borrow a small sum like that, of the Castor and Pollux, and all the time his rich relation was lodging overhead, and drawing his percentage on money put into the concern! And neither of 'em knew anything about the other's having dealings with us. That's the cream of the thing, sir. Oh, Lord bless you, talk of coincidences—the coincidences that have happened in that parlour alone, would fill volumes,—volumes! I often think that if I had time to write a novel, I could turn out something sensational that would astonish people;—and keep to facts all the while, too."

"Why don't you snatch a quarter of an hour now and then, Quickit, and give us a

novel?" said Demayne, with his woodenest expression of countenance. "It must be very easy. I think if it wasn't for the orthographical difficulties of the English language, I should write a novel myself. But it's the spelling that's so d—d difficult!"

Mr. Demayne's irony was lost on Quickit, whose tumbler Flagge had recently and quietly replenished.

"No, no; it isn't the spelling. Not at all, ha, ha, ha! Not—at—all. It's time that's wanting, sir. Minutes and hours; minutes and hours. But as far as incident goes—and *Co-incidence*, which is more, a great deal more—I could supply you *ad lib.*"

"Domestic dramas, I suppose, Quickit? Plenty of them, eh?" said Flagge.

"Not particularly domestic," returned the landlord, whose tendency to contradiction seemed aggravated by his potations. "I shouldn't style them peculiarly *domestic*, you know. Quite the reverse, ha, ha, ha!"

"I think the queerest thing I ever heard was that about the lady's-maid coming to borrow money for the diamonds," said Flagge.

"Oh, that's not the queerest thing, by any means. Oh dear, no! That kind of thing happens more often than you would suspect,

my dear sir, ha, ha, ha! Women—specially women in high life—are always up to some dodges. But the baronet, eh? a shrewd man, a wonderfully shrewd man! Such a head! And the way he managed to keep the Castor and Pollux in the background! I don't believe the big-wigs that he consorted with even knew where he lodged in town. No letters ever came for him here; all sent to the club, he told me. Close, eh?"

"Ah!" said Demayne, drawing his breath through his teeth, "your baronet's not the first man that hasn't cared to have his address known by his family when he was down on his luck in London. By George, in my own case——"

"Down on his luck? Good! Ha, ha, ha! Ve—ry good! Happy to hear from you again, sir! You never made a greater mistake in your life, Mr. Demayne. Down on his luck, eh? I tell you what, I wish I was down on my luck in the same way! He could have bought up our friends, Castor and Pollux, and never missed the money. I happened to know of one or two investments of his whilst he was living in my house, and they all turned up trumps, every one! Down on his luck? Ha, ha, ha! Positively that's the funniest

mistake. I've often wondered who got all the old boy's property. He made a will when he was in my house—in these drawing-rooms—this i-dentical and actual apartment, sir—and I witnessed it.”

“Did you, by G——?” exclaimed Flagge, pitching the end of his cigar into the fire with a sudden movement.

Quickit drew himself up with slightly inebriated dignity. “Yes, Dr. Flagge, I did, and I don't see what reason you have to doubt my word, sir.”

“You witnessed the will, did you? Why, then, of course you do know where all the property went! No need to wonder about the matter, eh?”

“I am sorry to contradict you, sir—very sorry, ha, ha, ha! But I will simply answer, it's nothing of the sort, sir! People do not read a will when they witness it! At least, they needn't to. I didn't. Sir Rupert Lowry wasn't likely to take me into his confidence, sir.”

“Wheugh!” whistled Demayne. “So your baronet was Sir Rupert Lowry, was he? Odd enough; I happen to know something about that family.”

“And that, then, was made after the will that—of course you know the date, Quickit?”



“Of course I know nothing of the kind, Dr. Flagge! Ha, ha, ha! not at all! I wish you good night, Dr. Flagge. There’s a meeting of our directors to-morrow morning, and I must have my head clear and my papers ready. Too much good company *may* result in muddle, ha, ha, ha! Good company combined with Bourbon whisky, you know, eh? I’m fond of society myself; always was. But duty, sir, duty calls. In the words of the convivial and lamented poet, ‘And doth not a meeting like this make amends?’ and so on. But unfortunately it don’t make amends for neglecting one’s business! By no means, ha, ha, ha! By—no—means! I wish you gentlemen a very good night!”

Then Demayne also went away, and Flagge was left to his own reflections.

## CHAPTER VII.

It was a cold, damp, dreary December evening in London. The shop-windows still sparkled and shone in the main thoroughfares; but in the genteeler streets, where commerce has not intruded, or where a few fashionable tradespeople present merely a dingy wire blind with a name on it to the curious gaze of the vulgar, the darkness was scarcely mitigated by street lamps blinking through the haze.

On such an evening, one sitting lonely by the firelight, and listening to the distant sounds of life and traffic in the streets, might fancy himself drifting with shades on the swart Lethean flood just bronzed by flaring torches, and hearing the voices of the living come faintly from the upper world with the sadness of an eternal farewell. The past, with its heart-wringing pathos, seems so near to us. The ghostly shades of vanished friends, of

those dearer than friends, flicker amid the lights and shadows on the wall. A distant rattle of hoof and wheel conjures up some yearning memory of lighted rooms, of cheerful gatherings, and smiling faces—never more to smile on us or on each other. A voice, a foot-step on the pavement, a laugh, a cheerily shouted greeting or farewell, can fill our eyes with tears. That which might have been—that which was, and is no more—these, these are with us as we sit lonely by the firelight on a winter's evening; whilst that which is—all the vast, surging, seething tide of life in the great city, flows past as with a sound made up of many voices, like the sound of the dread and infinite seas—"deep calling unto deep."

So sat Mary Lowry at the close of that drear December day. But, although lonely, she was not alone. Ænone, crouched on a low stool by the fire, rested her chin on her clenched hands, and stared with her wonderful eyes into the red heart of the glow. Neither had spoken for a long time. The twilight had died outright, and the unshuttered windows had grown to be mere black panels in the fitfully illumined wall.

Ænone's voice broke the silence, with low,

vibrating tones. "I have been reading a book about Indian creeds," she said; "and I wish I could believe in *Nirvana*."

"Enone! That is extinction, is it not?—annihilation?"

"It is rest," sighed Enone, with her eyes still fixed on the intense core of the fire.

"Nay; not so. Rest implies surely a sensation of pleasure in repose. *Nirvana* will not give you this. But I grieve to hear you talk so."

"I shock you?"

"Well,—yes; in a sense, you shock me."

"And that means that you feel angry with me?"

"No, Enone; it does not mean that."

"Does it not? At school, when Miss Crib said she was shocked, it meant that she was cross, and scolded," replied Enone, with curling lip. "Oh, but I know their cant. Those good kind ladies who were 'shocked' if they found out that I—a poor, wandering foreigner, a little shabby girl who taught music for food and shelter—had a soul inside me, a brain to think, a heart to aspire; I know them well. It did not shock them that I was helpless and friendless, as they thought. It shocked them that I did not lick their

charitable fingers, offering me a bone, as a dog might lick them."

After an instant, she added abruptly, "But I know that you are not like those women. You have nobler feelings. Yes, I know it, and I will not seem to lie even by silence."

There was a long pause. The fire cracked and flickered. A strong, swift footstep beat rhythmically on the pavement outside, passed, grew fainter, and was gone.

Then said CEnone with a weary sigh, "*Nirvana!* To be blown out like a flame! That is what it means, they say. Then it would be ended—all ended, in thick, soft darkness."

"My child, such thoughts are not natural to your age. Youth means hope. You are not well, CEnone."

"Not well! Why do you use that common prate? Are there no ills but ills of the body? Are there no pains that physic cannot touch? I think you English do but half believe in souls at all. If one has the heart-ache—'Give him drugs, or baths, or change of air!' That is the common cry. Give him *Nirvana*, I say—if you could but find the secret of that potion! Youth is hope? Perhaps. But what makes youth? Not to have lived only

a few years on earth : not that ! I think one may feel the weariness of centuries at seventeen."

"I think not. But one may feel the weariness of seventeen, and have only the strength of seventeen to endure it," answered Mary, quietly.

"Ah, you don't understand. You are happy."

Mary stretched out her hand and drew the girl nearer to her. CEnone passively obeyed the impulse, and sat down on the rug close to Mary's feet ; but she kept her face still turned towards the fire.

"CEnone, I think that in youth troubles seem the harder to bear because we are apt to think that such a burden was never laid on mortal before. We are lost in contemplation of our own woes ; but our woes are not the only ones."

"But it cannot comfort one to know that others suffer ! I have heard that preached by some of your good people. It seems to me merely barbarous !"

"It is not that the sufferings of others should comfort *you*, but that there is blessing and healing in the thought that you may comfort *them*, CEnone."

Enone put up her hand behind her head, and took Mary's fingers in her own. It was a rare and significant action with her, for she had an almost morbid shrinking from the touch of most persons, and she usually refused to conform to the custom of shaking hands, saying that there were so many hands whose contact made her shudder.

"I knew a girl once," said Mary, "who lived a quiet country life amongst quiet country people. Her pleasures were simple and sweet; her duties, quite plain, and clear. You would have thought that there could come nothing very hard or difficult into such a life; it seemed fenced and hedged round to be always safe and tranquil. But there did come a time when duty was no longer plain—when she had to grope and struggle unassisted to find the right. She had no mother. She was young. She wanted to be happy after her own fashion, but it could not be. Well, just now as I—who cannot, you say, understand you because I am so happy—sat here in the dimness, and watched the firelight make strange pictures on the wall, it seemed as if all my youth, my lost youth, came back, or its ghost came. My mother, who loved me so fondly—my father in his sad old age—he loved

me too, poor father—the brother who used to lead me by the hand and lift me on his pony when I was a little toddling child, and he was a bright handsome schoolboy—the friends I can remember all my life—some one—some one who was dearest of all—the dead hopes, the forgotten pleasures, the sunshiny summer day, the cheerful winter evenings, the very notes of an old fiddle on which they used to scrape out Sir Roger de Coverley for us young ones to dance to at Christmas—all the sights and sounds flowed out of some hidden corner of my heart as if a well-spring of tears had been touched there. What set it flowing? I don't know. A distant voice in the street beyond—the glint of the firelight—the sense of a great busy world outside there that cares nothing for me—who shall say?"

"I did not know *you* had ever been so sorry!" said Enone, simply.

"Yes; I have been sorry. I am often sorry. But, Enone, I don't invoke *Nirvana*! There may be some one whom I can help."

"Oh, if there were any one I could help—and yet perhaps I should not do it if it were very hard. I don't know. I used to feel so brave I could trample on myself, I thought. But now sometimes I—I am afraid."



"Afraid?"

"I didn't know how hard life was. It is so different thinking to be heroic, and being it."

"Poor child!"

"And then,—you don't know what it is to feel so terribly alone as I do. Sometimes it comes on me with a strange kind of dread. It is like a dream I have had of being on a little barren rock with the sea roaring all around me. The sharp hard rock is dreadful; the sea is more dreadful; and the loneliness! You would grasp at any hand—you would clutch at any living thing, when you feel so. And yet, if the only hand held out to you makes you shudder to touch it—! Oh, to sleep sound, and forget it all!"

"Ænone, tell me the truth. Is there any one whom you are afraid of—who persecutes you?"

Ænone drew her hand away from Mary's, and pressed it tightly against her own forehead, but she did not speak.

"If you will have confidence in me, I may help you; and you have other friends who can protect you more efficiently than I can."

Ænone only shook her head uneasily from side to side.

Mary made an effort to overcome a certain

shy constraint she felt in speaking of Vincent Maude to Cœnone. She laid her fingers softly on the girl's rich coils of hair, and said, "One of your best friends thinks that Dr. Flagge's influence is bad for you, and oppresses you. If you were to say one word to Major Maude, I am sure he would release you from that man's persecution—for I fear he does persecute you."

"No, no; I can't speak to him. No; don't say any more of that. It would only drive me to—no, say no more of that, I *pray* you."

"Shall I speak to him?"

Cœnone made a quick gesture of dissent.

"Or to Lady Lowry?"

"What can you say to Lady Lowry?"

"Nay, it is for you to tell me what to say. If you are distressed by the influence of that man, and will say so frankly, Lady Lowry will cease to bring you into contact with him."

"Dr. Flagge has more feeling for me than Lady Lowry. She has no feeling. But I do not want her to have any for me."

"My child, don't let a foolish pride prevent you from accepting advice and assistance."

"Pride is not foolish;—not pride in strong,

noble feelings. I must be proud. It is all I have. If I were not proud, I should die."

The pale wan face, the feverishly blazing eyes, the emaciated hands clenched forcibly together as she spoke, made a pathetic commentary on Enone's words.

Mary shook her head. "Don't lean on pride, Enone," she said gravely. "It has a sharp point, and will pierce you like a lance."

The two sat silent again for a long time. It was a black night outside, and the fire had burnt low within the room. The handle of the door was turned softly, and two persons came in, conversing as they entered. "It is a most important discovery," said a woman's voice. "I always was sure of it, though. I felt it. It was a regular presentiment, you know! Poor, dear old man, think what his feelings must have been all this time! You must not breathe one word to Miss Lowry at present. Do you hear? Not one word! I think myself——"

"Sarah! You don't see us! I am here with Enone."

"La! bless my heart, Mary, how you did startle me! Enough to bring on palpitation. What on earth are you sitting in the dark for?

Do ring for lights!" And my lady sat down with her hand pressed to her side.

The other person who had entered the room was Dr. Flagge. He now stepped forward and rang the bell. There was a short pause. Then Lady Lowry said in a complaining tone, "I cannot understand people liking to sit like this. The firelight always did make me feel dull. And I declare when I hear the muffin-bell in the streets before the lamps are lighted of an evening, it gives me such a lowness of spirits that I don't know what to do with myself. But some people don't feel things in that way."

Mary rose and left the room, with a very slight and haughty salutation to Flagge as she passed him. At the door she turned and said, "Rosamond is coming into my room to read with me for an hour before dinner. Will you come too, Enone?"

"Yes," answered Enone. "I will come." But she did not move.

A servant who appeared with a lamp informed his mistress that Mr. Wigmore was downstairs in the boudoir, and wanted to say one word to her ladyship.

"Shall I show him up here, my lady?" asked the man.

“No; I’ll go down to him. Dear, dear, everything comes at once! Go and give my compliments, and say I am coming. Dr. Flagge, don’t you go till I have seen you again. I want *particularly* to speak to you. Wait here.”

As the door closed behind her Ænone rose slowly and made as if she were going too. Flagge stretched out his hand with a gesture half of command, half of entreaty. “Stay, Miss Nony,” he said. And she stood still, looking at him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"I wish you didn't run away from me so often," said Flagge.

"I have not run away. I do not run away; that is for cowards."

"Oh, I know you've spirit enough for an army of heroes; real ancient Greek spirit! But what I mean is that you *feel* like running away all the time, and that hurts me, more'n you think for."

She stood looking at him in a dreamy way, and neither spoke nor moved.

"Look here, Miss Nony, just set yourself down there for one minute, and let me say what I want to say—if I can. 'Tain't so easy, but it's got to be said."

Enone obeyed him mechanically, as it seemed, and seated herself in the large chair beside the hearth which Mary had occupied. Flagge sat down too, but not close to her; he sat so that he could look full into her face as he spoke. But he did not avail himself of the

advantage of the position, for his eyes drooped and wandered, and he showed symptoms of nervousness. After a few seconds he began: "See now, Miss Nony, the chief thing is that you've got to believe in the truth of what I'm going to say to you. It *is* the truth. But first I'll ask you a question. You're not going back to that schoolmistress, Miss Cribb, I'm told. Is that so?"

Cenone bowed her head.

"Well, then—that's the first thing. Yes, that's the first thing."

He stopped hesitating in a confused manner, very different from his usual self-assured glibness. "Why do you give that up? It was a living. You earned your bread there, and something over."

"I can earn my bread by private pupils."

"But Miss Cribb's was a home. I wonder at you, Miss Nony, with your feelings of independence——"

"I earn my bread here. I teach Rosamond."

"What do the Czernovics say to it?"

"What matters what they say? I am not accountable to them—nor to you."

"Don't flash out on me," said Flagge, almost humbly.

The flash had been a very brief one, for CEnone almost immediately fell back into the dreamy, languid manner she had shown at the beginning of the interview.

"No, I know you ain't accountable to me. But I'm behind the scenes here. I know these people. I know Lady Lowry's character, the real nature of her, as you can't know it, and I tell you that all she wants is to make a catspaw of you. She wants to know what the spirits say to you; that's all. Soon as her turn's served, you won't be welcome here long."

CEnone roused herself with an apparent effort to answer him with some energy. "I will not be catechized," she said haughtily. "Why should you venture to speak to me as you do? If I am alone in the world, at least I will take the benefit of it as well as the pain; I will follow my own mind, and not another's. There is no reason why you should interfere to question me—no reason why I should answer you!"

"As to your answering—that's as it may be. As to my questioning—there is only one reason for it, but that's a pretty strong one." He paused for an instant, and his eyes met hers. The latter did not drop, but remained



looking full, at him with a strange expression. There was a kind of solemn, self-forgetting intentness in those eyes, and yet they conveyed in some indescribable way a sensation of lurking, latent dread. Flagg's gaze fell before them. He began plucking nervously at the silver buttons on his fantastic jacket as he proceeded: "It's a pretty strong reason—just about the strongest a man can have. I love you, Nony, and I s'pose you knew it afore I spoke."

She seemed to draw herself together and grow smaller, like a shrinking bird, but her eyes remained on Flagg's face.

"You did know it, Nony, didn't you?"

"I did know what you were going to say."

"Guess there's never a woman that don't know *that* secret before it's told out to her in words. But you're honestest than the rest, and you own it."

"I should have known what you were going to say, *then*, whatever it might have been."

"Well—since you knew what was coming and didn't stop me—I hope—I hope you don't altogether dislike to hear it, Nony."

"Why do you say it?"

He had been leaning forward to speak to her with his elbows resting on his knees, but

at this query he fairly started back. Enone was perfectly quiet, serious, and intent. Her face was white, her widely-opened eyes glittered. So strange a manner of receiving a declaration of love might have disconcerted a more massive-natured man than Flagge. It disconcerted him greatly. The first thing he did was to mutter a deep oath under his breath; it was merely his unpremeditated, almost instinctive way of expressing emotion, and he was really moved.

“By the Lord above, Nony,” he said, “I believe you are a kind of sprite without human feelings! I wonder does red blood run in your veins!” Then after an instant he burst out vehemently, striking his clenched hand against a little table near him. “Why do I say it? Because it’s been burning inside of my heart this long time, and it had got to be expressed. Look you here, Nony, I don’t say but what at first I sought after you just because you had a sensitive temperament favourable to the mesmeric developments. You were ‘a good subject,’ and I didn’t go beyond that. Not but from the very first I was kind of attracted to you, and that you were different in your influence on me from any woman I’d ever seen. And ’twasn’t

long 'fore I found that you were just simply the only woman in the world for me. I couldn't explain why, p'raps. There may be handsomer, cleverer, better-humoured girls—I dunno. But I do know that I never turn my eyes to look after 'em, whilst when you're in the room I don't only see you all the time, but I see nothing else. The world's just full of you, Nony! Is that love or ain't it? Answer, you!"

"Yes," she said, very faintly, rather forming the word with her lips than sounding it with her voice.

" 'Why do I say it?' Because I want you to take right hold of my hand and trust me. I want you to know there's some one in the world doesn't look on you as a music machine, or a mesmeric machine, or a machine to talk French or German. Some one that'll put you first in the whole round earth, and all the others a hundred miles behind you, let 'em be duchesses or any other d—d humbug they like! I've had a rough life, and lived with rough men, but I know God Almighty's patent of nobility when I see it. There's some as don't, I tell you."

If Flagge had schemed with industrious cunning to hit on a form of flattery which

should incline CEnone Balasso to listen to his suit, he could have found none better adapted for his purpose than this. The passion in his voice and his eyes was not simulated; only there was a certain dramatic instinct in the man—a kind of imitative sympathy—which impelled him to become, as it were, an accomplice of all vanities and weaknesses and self-esteem in those whom he wished to influence. His divining-rod was quiescent near many buried treasures, but it seldom failed to vibrate towards a hidden fault.

As he spoke, many varying expressions passed over CEnone's mobile face. First the intentness of expectation changed to disturbed surprise; then two bright spots of colour dawned on her white cheeks; lastly there stole into her great glittering eyes a dewy softness which veiled their lustre somewhat, but made them more wondrously beautiful than ever. There was still the old lurking look of fear, but it was mingled with compassion.

“ Oh, do you really care so much for me ? ” she said in the tone of one reluctantly acknowledging a sorrowful truth, and her face and her voice seemed tremulous with a new and adorable gentleness.

"Care for you, Nony! When you look so I feel as if I could lie right down and die at your feet."

He was pale with passion, and leaned back in his chair, pressing his hands across his eyes.

"I thought you were not speaking the truth at first, and I hated you. I thought you wanted to keep your influence over me. I am useful to you. They say I am useful to you, and that your influence is bad for me," said Enone, uttering her genuine thoughts with a crude, almost cruel, candour. But still the softness of her face and voice was exquisitely sweet, although her words seemed bitter.

Flagge removed his hands from his eyes. "They say! And I s'pose you believe what they say before me."

"No, not now. I think you do not always speak the truth. But I believe what you say now. I wish I did not believe it!"

"Nony!"

"Yes, I do. If I did not believe it, I should not feel sorry for you. It is very hard to love a person who cannot care for you. I am sorry. Life seems all sorrow, I think."

"But it needn't to be!—not *all* sorrow. Listen here, Nony. The words seem just

bubbling in my heart till I can't speak 'em. They kind of choke me. I wish there was one word, one great full syllable that 'ud say all I want to, and I could cry it out so as you'd feel it in every fibre of you. Listen here : you don't care for me as I care for you, nor you can't. 'Tain't in nature. Well, I know it. I'm resigned to it. I've lived down in dark sorts of depths fathoms below your sphere. You're one of them white-winged kind of creatures that seem as if they can't take a soil more'n a swan can. But you might take me up higher with you, if you would, Nony. I know you might. You say I don't always speak the truth—well, I ain't a going to lie to you, anyhow. No, I don't always speak the truth; 'twouldn't suit most folks if I did. My aristocratic customers like lies best—a deal best. But when 'they say' that my influence over you is bad, they—well, for your sake, Nony, I'll say they're *mistaken*, that's all. Influence! The fools, *which way is the influence?* Why, Nony, don't you see that I've lost the power I had over you?"

She started, and uttered a barely audible exclamation of surprise.

"There, I've said it, and it's the truth; I won't take it back. I could no more mag-

netize you now than I could magnetize that bronze statue a-horseback outside there."

"How can that be?"

"I only know it is. I haven't said so to Lady Lowry. She thinks my power over you is as strong as ever. P'raps I might have deceived you yourself about it—for a bit longer, at any rate."

"But is it true? Are you sure?"

"Will you let me try?"

He made one or two passes, but his hand trembled, and his glance faltered. Enone's eyes were fixed on his, scrutinizingly. Suddenly Flagge dropped his hand and passed his handkerchief across his forehead. "I can't do it, Nony," he said. "Your friends needn't be afraid of my influence over you. I guess it's *my* friends have got to be afraid—or would be if I had any."

There was an appeal to her compassion in the words and the tone which moved her powerfully.

"I know what it is to be friendless," she said. "I have been friendless as long as I can remember. Oh, I don't mean that I have not found kindness,—from the Czernovics and others. But friends—that is different."

"You've got one now, Nony. See, now, I

ain't a going to boast about what I can do for you—though something a man that loves a woman as I love you can always do to help her through life—but only think what you can do for me! Money I know you don't care for, but I can work for both of us. I've made some cash since I been in this country. And I can make more. If you'll just throw me down one crumb of hope to live on, even if you do it no kinder than you'd throw a bone to a starving dog, I'll wait, and work, and you shall see if I don't make a home for you. Beyond seas if you like. Why shouldn't we go right away from all the lies and the humbug and the insolence of fools not worthy to loose your shoe-tie, and make a life for ourselves? Why, Nony, if you'd like it, why shouldn't we go to Greece, to your own beautiful country? I'd do that for you and more, if you'd only let me! I've a strong will, Nony, and I can be smart enough, too, with the outside world. I have been smart enough up to to-day, to do whatever I'd a mind to, sooner or later. And think what I might achieve when I'd not only a mind, but a heart to it! Let me take you away from them all, and put you in a shrine of your own, and worship you. I know I ain't your equal. I



know I'm ignorant of book-learning compared to you, but anyhow I've had mind enough to appreciate you,—and that's more'n these superfine folks have got to, with all their education. Nony, just say one little word to give me a hope, and I'll wait, and be dumb, and patient, and not ask to touch your hand or the hem of your garment, until you give me leave!"

Cenone was not made of such stern stuff that she was insensible to this fervid wooing. It is in the eternal nature of things that to be loved and woo'd is so intensely sweet to the womanly heart, that even a simulated love, a false idol, may chance to be accepted without question. Every woman has an ideal of Love in her soul; and she will often bow down before his image carved out of base stuff, as a Spanish peasant worships some blackened tawdry doll, set up as a symbol of the pure and radiant Madonna. Cenone had an intense craving for sympathy and admiration, a fantastic pride which exaggerated her claims to these on imaginary grounds, and a shy modesty which made her distrustful of her purely personal merits; she nourished a secret romance of unrequited passion; she was jealous, sensitive, affectionate,—and seventeen

years old. What wonder that this man's passionate words, made eloquent by looks and tones, swayed her as a reed is swayed by the wind? There was no longer a marble coldness on her cheek, a proud gleam in her eye. She was flushed, and trembling, and the tears ran down her face and glittered on her long black lashes. Flagge paused in the torrent of his words and looked at her. "I never thought to be glad to see you cry, Nony," he said, "but I thank God that you do feel for me. You believe me, Nony. You can't help it."

"I believe you; yes, I do believe you. And I thank you. I am not ungrateful. But I am sorry,—oh, so grieved and sorry!"

"As to gratitude, there can be no talk of that from you to me. As well expect the sun to be grateful because we see he shines! I don't flatter you, Nony, as some might. I don't tell you you are the most beautiful creature in the shape of a woman that ever walked this earth. I dunno, scarcely, whether you're beautiful or not. But I love you, that's all. You've a power over me that no human being ever had yet. Instead of me controlling you and drawing you, by imagination, or will, or anything else, it's you control me. You

might set your little foot right down on me this minute. I'm at your mercy."

Again, no cunning premeditation could have taught him a subtler appeal to her than this unconditional surrender. In her young ardent worship for all that was heroic, to be outdone in magnanimity seemed to her a most grievous burthen.

"I wish I could do anything to show you that I am grateful, and—and—to make amends for having so much misjudged you," she said. "I *wish* I could! But for loving you—I cannot."

"Will you let yourself be loved? I'm more than willing to strike that bargain! Nony, won't you give me one kind word?"

He drew nearer to her as he spoke, and she shrank away with a movement which was all the more significant because it was wholly involuntary.

"The kindest word would be to tell you to go away and never see me any more. I can never love you,—never, never! And I would give ten years of my life—no; that says nothing,—I would live ten years longer to make you not love me."

Her shrinking movement of repulsion, far more than her words, stung him so intolerably

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that he was driven beyond all self-command. "Do you think I don't understand it all?" he said, fiercely. "It ain't so much that you don't love me—I didn't expect you should, all at once—as that you do love some one else. You're just casting yourself down at the feet of that hulking Englishman,—a fellow who'd think you barely good enough to be a lady's maid or hired companion to the women that have the honour and glory to belong to *him*!"

He knew even while he was speaking the words that they would outrage and offend her,—perhaps beyond forgiveness. Nevertheless he spoke them; being goaded by a desperate impulse of pain and anger. But when he ceased and looked at her, he was stricken with a sudden fear at what he had done.

All the softness and warmth had gone out of Enone's face. It looked white and frozen; and her eyes seemed to see something which filled them with terror. And truly she did see something which terrified her, but it was with her mind, and not with her bodily vision that she saw it. She looked into the future as one looks down into some dreadful gulf;—not upward, nor onward. Was this what life had in store for her? Not heroism and noble

sorrows, and a poetic ideal, and self-sufficing disdain for the mean pettiness of the vulgar—whether high or low; not these, no; but to be coarsely ridiculed, or coarsely pitied; to be exposed to hear the sacredest feelings of her soul discussed with brutal frankness;—for who was she, and what was her place in the world, that men should pay her the hypocrisy of respect?—to fall from her fancied height, below the level of the humblest woman who had father, husband, or brother to protect her!

Morbid and overstrained as such thoughts were, they were none the less real to C  none. None the less did they pierce her to the heart. None the less bitter and crushing was the mortification she suffered, because, with the egotism of youth and inexperience, she exaggerated both its nature and extent. For although she had led a poor precarious life,—although she had consorted with nomad tribes of the artistic Bohemia,—although her home had been for years with people whom the respectable of the world called “vagabonds,” and who accepted the appellation with a smile and a shrug, yet she had hitherto been as safe from insult as the most daintily-nurtured lady in the land. Poverty she had known by her

own experience; debt and duns she was familiar with in the experience of those around her; sorrow and heartache had come as she grew out of childhood; but the bitterness of personal humiliation she had never known until that moment. The coarse, blunt phrase in which Flagge had spoken his thought, even more than the knowledge that he had the thought, seemed to strip her poor secret of all glory and beauty, and to leave it an object of contempt and ridicule. She felt as if her very heart had been bared to an intolerable glare of eyes.

There was silence for perhaps a minute. Then Ænone rose up from her chair, and moved towards the door.

“Nony!” said Flagge, and he looked at her as if he were pleading for his life, “won’t you speak one word?”

She did not even turn her eyes on him, but advanced towards the door. But she seemed to move with an uncertain step as if she were dizzy.

“You won’t leave me like this, Nony! You won’t be so right down cruel and heartless! My God! You drive a man clean mad, and then you punish him for not being in his cool senses?”

She had reached the door by this time, and was fumbling with the handle.

“Listen, Nony, I take back what I said. I’ll ask your pardon on any terms if you like. Can’t you understand that if I didn’t love you desperate I should never have been driven to say what I did !”

He stretched out his hand to detain her, but at the same instant she succeeded in opening the door, and swaying heavily forward would have fallen to the ground if she had not been caught by Percival Wigmore, who appeared at the head of the staircase in the wake of Lady Lowry.

## CHAPTER IX.

"HILLOA!" exclaimed the gallant Percy. "Miss Balasso! She's fainted. Jove! it is lucky I came up in the nick of time, or she'd have gone headlong down the stairs as safe as the day! We'd better get her on to a sofa here. And haven't you got some sal volatile or something?"

What with surprise, obesity, and the tightness of his garments, Percy was panting and puffing under the effort to carry even *Cenone's* light weight into the drawing-room, when *Flagge* swooped down on him, lifted her from his arms, and placed her on a couch. It all passed so quickly that *Lady Lowry* followed them into the drawing-room in a confused state of mind as to what had happened.

"What is it? Good gracious! I can't understand such extraordinary ways. It's a mercy that she didn't fall on me, and knock me backwards down the stairs!" And my



lady, overcome by the image she had conjured up, sank into a chair with very decided symptoms of requiring the general attention to be diverted from Enone to herself.

Flagge remained on his knees beside the motionless girl, fanning her white face with a hand-screen, whilst Percy rang the bell and issued orders for water and sal volatile, and bustled about very zealously.

"I understand all about how to treat a swoon. My wife used to be very subject to that sort of thing,—*attaque de nerfs*, eh! Air! that's the grand thing. Lots of air, don't you know? And just sprinkle the forehead with fresh water, sharp—like this!" And Mr. Wigmore, suiting the action to the word, flicked a considerable quantity of ice-cold water into the face of the majestic Lobley, who stood by with an official air; causing that functionary to start and gasp, to the detriment of his dignity.

"Eh? La, bless me! Bad shot, eh? Look here, Flagge! It's no good dabbing her forehead with a wet handkerchief. You must send the water with a sudden dash, don't you know? This way!"

Lobley on this occasion made a skilful and hasty dive to avoid the shower; and conse-

quently Mr. Wigmore's efforts resulted merely in the drenching of the sofa cushions,—a consequence which the ducal one found himself able to regard with well-bred indifference.

All this while Lady Lowry was left to the attentions of her maid, who, being a very superior young person, and not inspired by the masculine sympathy with girlishness and black eyes which softened Lobley's bosom towards Miss Balasso, was in the habit of treating that young foreigner with distinguished disdain upon all occasions.

"I'm sure, my lady," she said. "*You* ought to lie down. Do take a few drops of sal volatile, my lady! You have become quite pale. I think persons might have more consideration than to startle your ladyship in that sort of way. Mr. Wigmore! Would you be kind enough to drop a little sal volatile into this tumbler for my lady?"

Thus appealed to, Percy relinquished his attempts to revive Enone, and hovered about Lady Lowry, casting, however, a sympathetic glance at the swooning girl from time to time.

"Shall I fan you?" he said to Lady Lowry. "Look here, this is the best way; you send a gentle current of air—so! But *you* don't feel faint, do you? You look all right!"

"My lady was deathly pale an instant ago, sir," put in the Abigail, with an air of virtuous protest.

"Talk of paleness, Lady Lowry, did you ever see any one look so pale as Miss Balasso, poor little thing! Just like marble, isn't she? And those black eyelashes of hers on her white cheeks—wonderful eyelashes, ain't they?"

"I think Miss Balasso has behaved with great want of consideration and proper feeling," said my lady deliberately.

"La! But she couldn't help fainting, don't you know?"

"If she felt indisposed she should have retired to her own apartment. She has a very nice bed-room next to Moore's" (Moore was Lady Lowry's maid), "and every comfort. And I think it would have been more becoming to go to it—much more becoming, than to upset a whole household in this way, and to startle me as she has done. My nerves are not strong enough to cope with this sort of thing, I can assure you, Mr. Wigmore," said my lady, somewhat loud of voice and flushed of cheek.

"Don't like my noticing the eyelashes!" thought Percival to himself with a complacent chuckle. He prided himself on his

knowledge of the sex, and was quite convinced that he understood all its little foolish jealousies. But he liked the feminine nature none the worse for attaching so much importance to manly admiration : not at all ! He was very indulgent.

At length Enone began to recover consciousness. At the first ripple of returning life which trembled across her face, Flagge rose up from his knees, and moved so as to be out of her sight when she should open her eyes. She did open them widely and suddenly, but for a second or two she did not appear to recognize any object before her.

"You should get her some brandy. Her pulse is very feeble," said Flagge in a low tone. The order had been anticipated by Wigmore, who, taking a small glass of cognac from Lobley, proceeded to pour a little of it down Enone's throat. "I think she's coming round all right now," said he kindly. "Poor little thing ! How d'ye feel now, Miss Balasso ? Don't move. Lie still a little bit longer. Nothing to be frightened at, you know. Just a sort of dizziness ! Don't be frightened !"

Her eyes were in truth full of a strange expression of terror, as she looked around her

as far as her range of vision could extend without turning her head. But after a moment she seemed reassured, for she closed her eyes with a little sigh of relief.

"She'll do now," said Wigmore. "Famous! Oh, I know exactly what to do for any one in a fainting fit. Dooced lucky I happened to come upstairs just in the nick of time, wasn't it, Lady Lowry?"

"Dear me, you said that before," returned my lady, brusquely.

"Lucky, I mean, because it saved you from a collision, don't you know? The poor girl was swinging forward as helpless as a log."

"Don't speak of it! It brings on palpitation even to think of what would have happened if she had come against me. I know I should have fallen. I dread the effect on Sir Cosmo when he hears about it. It will upset him frightfully,—frightfully!"

"Oh, do you think he'll mind—I mean so long as it didn't upset *you*, you know? Because it might have been worse, eh?"

"Dr. Flagge!" cried my lady, imperiously, "where are you going? You mustn't go away! I wish to speak with you particularly. I told you I wished to speak with you."

"I will wait for you downstairs, then," said

Flagge, pausing as he crossed the room. "It would disturb her again to see me just now. I can't stay here. She—I—the magnetic influence just overcame her for the moment—she's weak. You'll find me in your boudoir, if you want me." And Dr. Flagge went out of the room without further ceremony.

"Disturb *her*, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Lowry, almost breathless in her outraged dignity. "I don't understand what Dr. Flagge means by this sort of thing. It may suit the Dableys or the Petheringtons to take such liberties, but I don't approve of it in *my* house. Particularly not before the servants," added she, lowering her voice as she glanced across the room. "I assure you, Mr. Wigmore, I would not have had Dr. Flagge speak to me in that free and easy manner before Lobley for more than I can say. It looks so strange!"

"Oh, bless you, Flagge don't mean anything. It's no good blowing him up. He's a child of nature, don't you know? My idea is this—and I know something of life—either make up your mind to stand him as he is, or else kick him out. Of course a lady couldn't exactly do that; but you know what I mean! —Give him the cold shoulder, don't you

know? Oh, Flagge's a very amusin' fellow if you take him in the right way. It would be pleasanter if he didn't look quite so much like a galvanized corpse, pr'aps, but——"

"Goodness, Mr. Wigmore, how can you say such horrid things?"

"Well, but he does look ghastly, now don't he? Uncommon ghastly he looks to-day."

"What is to be done with Miss Balasso, if you please, my lady?" asked the maid. "I suppose she can't lie here on this sofa all night."

"Oh, don't bother her! Just let her be, poor child! She'll come round right enough if you leave her quiet," began good-natured Percy.

"Allow me, if you please, Mr. Wigmore," said my lady, majestically. "Miss Balasso cannot possibly be left quiet on the sofa in my drawing-room all the evening. Don't you think you could get up to your own room, Miss Balasso? It would be much better for you to make the effort, I'm sure."

"Yes," said Enone, faintly. Then she struggled up, and stood on her feet, looking round like a hunted frightened creature.

"Perhaps, my lady," said Lobley, "we could assist her as far as Miss Lowry's apart-

ment. There's a good fire in Miss Lowry's dressing-room, and I think Miss Balasso would be comfortable and quiet there, until she's able to get up as high as her own room, my lady."

This suggestion was acted upon. Wigmore insisted on giving CEnone his arm upstairs, whilst Lobley followed with the smelling-bottle and a phial of sal-volatile, and, thus escorted, CEnone was safely deposited in the care of Mary Lowry, who had been reading in her own room with Rosamond, and knew nothing of what had happened.

Then Wigmore took his leave, receiving a very cool farewell from my lady; and meditated as he walked homewards on the singular unreasonableness of the female nature when moved by jealousy. "It's so stoopid, too," reflected the youthful-hearted Percy, "because she's a devilish deal the prettier woman of the two. In point of fact that little Balasso ain't pretty at all:—bag of bones, poor little thing! My lady 'll come round in time. And she's really an uncommonly nice sort of woman. Don't set up for intellect,—in fact, don't bore one in any way. Sort of woman a fellow can get on with comfortably, if he only knows how to manage her."



Meanwhile the subject of these reflections descended to her boudoir, where she found Dr. Flagge pacing up and down, restless and agitated.

"How is she now?" he asked, as soon as he saw Lady Lowry.

That model of a genteel young matron found her patience in imminent danger of giving way altogether. "She? If you allude to Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge, I believe her to be very well,—and I don't feel at all sure that there has been much the matter with her at all. It's very interesting to faint away. And persons accustomed to public exhibitions may take that way of making themselves interesting for aught I know, when they find they don't excite attention in any other way!"

Flagge was tapping his fingers nervously on the table whilst my lady spoke, and did not appear to give that undivided attention to her words which she considered due to them.

"I think you ought to send for a doctor to see her," said he, looking up.

"Pray don't trouble yourself about Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge! There is a great deal too much fuss made about that young person. And I don't approve of it. Why should you

put yourself into such a state, pray? She isn't the first sickly young woman who ever fainted, I suppose!"

My lady was hot, and had lost the polite repose of manner which it was her aim to preserve. In a word, she had become subject to that infirmity from which not even the genteelst principles can entirely guard ladies of her character;—she was in a spiteful ill-temper. Her heat, however, had the effect of suddenly cooling Dr. Flagge. He became calm—at least outwardly,—watchful, and self-possessed, as usual.

"Well," said he, "I don't know as she is the first, nor I don't suppose she'll be the last, neither. But if we're not to attend to any sick folks except when they developè new and original symptoms, I guess the doctors might as well retire from business and take to coffin-making. However, see here, you'd better have Nony looked after. If she got a bad illness it might be awkward for you. Folks 'ud be sure to say that the mesmerizing and spiritism had overthrown her nervous system. There's your sister-in-law, would be one of the first;—and that hulking major,—and plenty more."

"Awkward for *me*?" said my lady, with her most stolid and wide-eyed look. "I don't see that!"

"Oh, but other folks would!"

"I'm not responsible to anybody for Miss Balasso, Dr. Flagge. If Major Maude chooses to consider himself her guardian, he'd better look after Miss Balasso himself. I'm sure he makes a fuss about her that disgusts me."

"He does, does he? He's wonderfully kind, is Major Maude!"

"I wish he'd make up his mind to marry her, and take care of her altogether!"

"Do you? Well, I don't."

"Really? I suppose you've no particular wish on the subject one way or the other. But I've had enough of Miss Balasso for the present, Dr. Flagge, so, if you please, we'll drop the subject, and proceed to something of *importance*. You were just beginning to tell me, when we got upstairs and found Miss Lowry in the drawing-room, that you had reason to believe that Sir Rupert had actually made a will after that unjust one that was acted upon, and which I never believed in; and that you could put your hand on one of the witnesses who signed that will. Now, I wish to know who the witness is, where he

lives, and how long ago he signed the will—and, in short, *all* particulars.”

Before replying Flagge went to the door and opened it abruptly, so as to catch any eavesdropper who might chance to be near it. There was no one in the hall, however. The house was quite still. Flagge stood for an instant listening, and as he so stood, Mary Lowry's maid descended the stairs. Miss Balasso was much better, she said. Miss Lowry had kept her in her dressing-room by the fire, and thought that she would be well enough to come down to dinner at eight o'clock. Then Dr. Flagge returned to the boudoir, closed the door carefully; seated himself opposite to my lady, with his elbows on the table, and said :

“It's just as well to have a clear understanding, Lady Lowry. I understand you pretty well. I know what you want, both from what you've said yourself, and from what the spirits have told me about you. But you don't quite understand me. And what I want is nat'rally uninteresting to a lady of your beauty and exalted fashion. But, seeing that what I want has considerable more of interest for me than anything else just at present, and seeing, moreover, that you can't get what you

want without me, why, I've arranged a few indispensable conditions in my own mind, and before going any further into the business you want to know about—I'm just a-going to tell em' to you."

## CHAPTER X.

THE party that was assembled at dinner in Green Street that evening was anything but a cheerful one. Enone appeared at table. She showed great disinclination to be treated as an invalid, and declared that her indisposition had entirely passed away. But she looked ill, and her voice was faint and hollow ; and altogether, as Lady Lowry said, it was very trying to see that white face opposite to one when one was eating, looking more like a ghost than a creature of flesh and blood.

Mary Lowry was disturbed and ill at ease. She suspected that Flagge was in some way connected with Enone's strange and sudden prostration of strength and spirits ; but her conjectures only had reference to his mesmeric influence over the girl. She had never conceived the idea of his looking on her in any other light than as a pliable subject for his schemes and impostures. Mary had not honoured Dr. Flagge with very close atten-

tion; nor, indeed, had she been willing to do so, could she have had many opportunities of watching him, for ever since the "spirits" had banished her from the *séances* she had only met the medium casually for a few minutes at a time in her brother's house.

Rosamond was influenced by the air of general depression in the faces around her; and of the whole party, perhaps, Sir Cosmo came the nearest to being in his usual condition of mind. He ate his dinner almost in silence, but when the dessert came he began to talk.

"How are you now, Sally?" he said. "Better for your dinner? Take some more wine. Yes—nonsense! That claret won't hurt you. Miss Balasso, you nearly broke your own neck and my wife's too, I understand. Lady Lowry has been very nervous ever since she saw you coming down upon her through the air head foremost."

Enone looked at him with a face like that of a tragic Muse. "I did not hurt her?" she said. "I know nothing."

"No, dear, Mr. Wigmore caught you before you fell," said Rosamond.

"I believe we have found out a reason for Wigmore's existence," said Sir Cosmo, holding

up his glass to the light. "I have occasionally wondered what he could possibly have been created for; but now it's clear that his mission was to save Miss Balasso's life."

"I think he saved *me* quite as much as Miss Balasso, Cosmo."

"H'm! Then there are two reasons for his existence. By-and-by we shall discover that he was indispensable to the due working of the solar system."

"I shall always like Mr. Wigmore better from this time henceforward," announced Miss Rosamond, decisively.

"Really, Rosy," exclaimed her father, "that is very important indeed, and ought, if possible, to be communicated to Wigmore without delay!"

"Oh, I don't mind you laughing at me, papa;"—her cheeks grew very hot and red, however—"but I think Mr. Wigmore showed a great deal of kind feeling this evening. I never thought he had so much heart; he always seems so silly!"

"Upon my word, Rosamond, I think you ought not to be quite so presumptuous in judging of—of persons older than yourself!" said Lady Lowry.

"Oh, I know he's old enough, but——"



"Pray check that tendency to sauciness, Rosamond! I assure you it is vulgar! When I was your age I should not have dreamt of setting myself up to judge of people as you do."

"I didn't know I was setting myself up," returned Rosamond. "I'm sure I thought everybody called Mr. Wigmore silly."

Sir Cosmo upon this came as near to laughing as he ever did; that is to say, he smiled with closed lips, and uttered a series of little snorts at the same time. And my lady grew angry. "I know," she observed, "that Mr. Wigmore is not liked or appreciated in some quarters, simply because he is my friend, and because he makes me the first consideration in my own house. As to being silly—I can only say that I find his conversation most entertaining—*most* so! And his manners have the stamp of high birth."

Lady Lowry, with these words, rose majestically, and led the way out of the dining-room, but she intimated that she was not going upstairs at once. "You will excuse me, Mary," she said; "I have some business to discuss with Cosmo. I shall perhaps not be able to join you in the drawing-room at all this evening."

This prospect at once made Rosamond's face clear and brighten. And, to say truth, Mary also appeared to receive the intelligence with considerable cheerfulness. She went upstairs with the two girls, and my lady proceeded to Sir Cosmo's private den, in which he was in the habit of smoking and studying the sporting papers. By an odd perversity of things, whereas Lady Lowry's step-daughter and sister-in-law seemed not ill-pleased to get rid of her company, Lady Lowry's husband displayed some dissatisfaction at the prospect of having it.

"Can't you say your say by-and-by, Sally?" he asked. "Let me smoke my cigar in peace. You always make no end of a fuss about not being able to stand tobacco smoke."

But my lady declared that she could not, and would not, put off the saying of her say to any such indefinite period as "by-and-by." As to the tobacco smoke, she would endure it; stipulating only that it should proceed from some Russian cigarettes which her husband had, and not from a large and strong-smelling cigar. Sir Cosmo threw himself into a chair, with an expression of countenance compounded of a strong inclination to rebel, a lazy conviction that it wasn't worth while,

and an attempt to make it appear that he was having his own way and not being forced into taking any one else's.

Then my lady, having settled herself in an arm-chair as comfortably as circumstances would permit, began to narrate all that Flagge had said to her that afternoon.

"Now, it's no use, Cosmo, your making light of it, and turning up your nose, this time. The thing is a great deal too serious. You see there *was* a will made after that wicked one,—poor old gentleman, I ought not to say 'wicked,' though, for I'm sure he was played upon shamefully!—and the will was witnessed here in London, and the question now is, Where is it?" said my lady, summing up breathlessly.

"The question is, rather—Is it at all?"

"No, Cosmo. I'm as sure that that will was made as that I'm sitting here!"

Sir Cosmo was undeniably impressed by what his wife had told him. He had for some time past been allowing his avarice to gloat over the idea of possessing Lowry Place, and the twelve thousand pounds bequeathed to Mary. Sarah's strong faith infected him against—or at least without—his will. But he kept up a semblance of incredulous in-

difference. "Who gave this precious information to Flagge? How did he come by it?" he asked with a sniff.

"The spirits gave it to him, Cosmo."

"Fudge!"

"And they have told him all manner of things about Sir Rupert which he couldn't possibly have known or heard from any mortal. Why, when he has mesmerized Miss Balasso, Cosmo, she has described Lowry Place, and the dog, and Mary's room there, and the walnut-wood writing-desk, and everything, most wonderfully! And he says that it's chiefly Sir Rupert's spirit who communicates the information to her in her sleep. I suppose you don't think Miss Balasso—the Peppiats' *favourite* Miss Balasso—is an impostor, if you doubt Dr. Flagge?"

"The Peppiats are exactly the sort of people to be taken in by anybody, for that matter! But granting she's not an impostor, of course she only repeats what's in Flagge's mind, when she's in this mesmeric, cataleptic, or whatever-you-call-it condition. However, all that doesn't matter a straw. The thing is, Has this man got some real information, however he came by it, or has he not?"

"He has got some real information, and the

spirits gave it him," persisted my lady, with her own unassailable dogged firmness.

"H'm! But as to his terms, you know, they're preposterous!"

"They're rather dear, Cosmo. But if we got what he promises, it would be worth our while."

"I'm not going to buy a pig in a poke. I don't believe in his spirits, and so I should tell him plainly if I spoke to him. And I think that perhaps the better way would be for me to speak to him."

When her husband said this, Sarah felt that she had gained a great victory; for nothing short of some measure of belief in Flagge's revelations would have got the better of Sir Cosmo's natural and habitual indolence as to induce him to offer such a suggestion. She feared, indeed, that he might offend the medium by scoffing at his supernatural pretensions; but she reflected on the other hand that Flagge had shown himself eager to drive a bargain with her for further information, and her intelligence accepted the conclusion that he would not allow himself to be baulked of his purpose by anything so flimsy as fine feelings. She therefore encouraged her husband's idea, and urged him to visit the medium without delay.

Sir Cosmo "jibbed" a little at this. The coercion of immediate action was always galling to him; and he began to repent of his incautious words when he found that his wife intended him to carry them out. However, my lady was not easily baffled, and she did not leave Sir Cosmo to solitude and his cigar, until it had been arranged between them that he should drive to Flagge's lodgings immediately after breakfast on the following morning.

"I shall tell Lobley to order the brougham for ten o'clock, Cosmo," said she. And her husband, although he muttered sundry anathemas against the brougham, and Lobley, and Flagge, and things in general, felt that there would be no escape for him, and tacitly acquiesced in the arrangement.

As he was rolling down to Howard Buildings, Strand (where Mr. Quickit's house was situated), the next morning, Sir Cosmo found his nervous system rebellious even to the soothing influence of a cigar. He called himself a fool for embarking in such a business at all. And he prefixed an epithet to the word "fool" which was the measure of his mental disturbance. Sir Cosmo was one of those persons who find strong language almost

as efficacious in working off their passions, whenever the passion begin to boil over—in getting rid of superfluous steam, in short—as strong action. He was not likely to kick a man, let him be offended never so grievously, but he was pretty sure to lash out hard with his tongue, even for an offence which might not be very grievous. A volley of oaths had greatly relieved his pent-up feelings by the time he reached Howard Buildings. And when he alighted on Mr. Quickit's doorstep, he was, if not quite at his ease, at all events, to all outward appearance, as coolly disagreeable as usual.

He declined to send up his card, when invited to do so by the slatternly maid-servant who opened the door, but told the girl to say that a gentleman from Green Street wished to have a few minutes' conversation with Dr. Flagge. The girl hesitated for an instant, but she was impressed by the fact of Sir Cosmo's having arrived in a private carriage with a servant in livery; and, moreover, a rapid survey of the baronet had convinced her that this man's gloves and boots were not as the gloves and boots of most visitors to Howard Buildings. Good clothes appealed to the feelings of this slatternly young woman with

no less cogency than to the feelings of her superiors. So she set off to do the well-dressed gentleman's bidding without farther parley. Sir Cosmo followed her up the stairs, and when she opened the drawing-room door, and left it slightly open, he could see and hear what passed within.

Flagge was sitting at a round table covered with the remains of breakfast. He wore a large and showy dressing-gown of silk, wadded and quilted. But his uncombed locks and his unshaven chin were not in keeping with this smart garment. He held a half-smoked cigar between his finger and thumb, but it was not alight; and his whole expression and attitude as he sat staring at the fire denoted listless despondency.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, Dr. Flagge," said the maid servant, walking close up to his chair.

"Who is he, and what does he want?"

"Well, he wouldn't give his name, but said he was the party from Queen Street. I think he's a reg'lar swell. He come in a private brougham with a livery footman, and his boots is as shiny as shiny," returned the damsel, unconscious that the subject of this eulogy was so near her.



"I don't know anybody from Queen Street," began Flagge, when Sir Cosmo advanced into the room.

"Good morning," said Sir Cosmo, curtly. "Sorry to disturb you, but I should like to have a word or two with you. I shan't keep you long."

Flagge had only seen the baronet once before, but he recognized him immediately, and rising from his seat, held out his hand.

"Sir Cosmo! How do you do? I hope her ladyship is well. Please to take a chair right here beside the fire, won't you?"

"*Sir Guzman*," muttered the maid-servant to herself as she shuffled down the kitchen stairs, making a rhythmic tattoo with one slipper down at heel. "I knowed he was a swell!"

"What can I have the honour of doing for you, Sir Cosmo Lowry?" asked Flagge when the door was closed. He spoke in his habitual melancholy tone, with that peculiar inflection of remonstrance in it which has been noted before in these pages.

"I'm afraid it's very doubtful whether you can do anything for me, Mr. Flagge, but my lady thinks you can!" replied Sir Cosmo, with a sniff intended to imply that his words were to be accepted jocosely.

"Lady Lowry's a lady of uncommon powers of mind, Sir Cosmo. I guess you'd better think as she thinks. You won't go far wrong at that."

"H'm! Well—I suppose—of course you know what I've come for, Mr. Flagge?"

"Well, I know a good many things, Sir Cosmo, that's a fact. But I'm not sure as I'm able to define exactly what your motive for coming here this morning is; no, sir."

"H'm! Ha!" Sir Cosmo crossed one leg impatiently over the other. "That means you don't choose to speak first. I suppose I'd better state the thing in plain words, then."

"Why, I do suppose it might be conducive to a mutual understanding between us, Sir Cosmo."

"Well, then, in plain words, you have professed to my wife that you have certain information about a will made by my late father subsequently to the will which has been proved and acted upon. You profess that you will be able to obtain further information on the subject, and for obtaining that information and communicating it to us, you ask a sum of money. Is that a correct statement?"

"I b'lieve it ain't far wrong, Sir Cosmo."

"You're not fond of plain 'Yes' or 'No,' Mr. Flagge?"

"Well, sir, there's a baldness about 'em; yes, sir."

Sir Cosmo was considerably taken aback by the cool simplicity of this reply. He had an uneasy misgiving that he was being laughed at, and a strong desire not to betray that misgiving, which together made him uncomfortable. "I presume you are aware that in asking money for any such information you are advancing the quite monstrous and untenable theory that you have exclusive and secret means of obtaining that information?" said he, almost snappishly.

Flagge smiled. "Well, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said he, slowly, "if that theory's so monstrous, it seems a'most a pity to have put yourself to the trouble of driving down here just to say so—don't it?"

This time Sir Cosmo was quite sure that he was being laughed at.

"I came here, Mr. a—a—Flagge, in compliance with Lady Lowry's wish——"

"Well, that's an amiable motive, anyhow!"

"And because I don't think she's fitted to deal with—with gentlemen of your remarkable acuteness."

"Well, now, I wouldn't say so, myself. Lady Lowry has a very good notion of making a deal, sir. Ladies very often have."

"Of course you know that I don't believe in your spirits."

"I guessed you might be a likely sort of gentleman to disbelieve."

"I take that as a great compliment to my common sense! No, I don't believe in the spirits at all. Therefore, you see, when I am told that such and such information has been communicated by the spirits, the first question I ask is, 'Has the information been given at all?'"

"Just so; and not being able to resist the belief that I've got *some* information—let me have come by it how I may—you get up a little earlier than usual one fine morning, to come and find out if you can what it is that I know, and whether my knowledge is worth buying, or whether you can't get at it for nothing, which would be best of all."

This came so near being an accurate statement of Sir Cosmo's sentiments on the subject as for the moment to disconcert him. Moreover, he did not at all relish being talked to in this free-and-easy manner by a person like Flagge. But he said to himself that we

cannot handle pitch without certain disagreeable consequences ensuing; and that he (Sir Cosmo) knew the world a great deal too well to waste time in asserting his dignity to a fellow of that sort.

"My good sir," said Sir Cosmo, "excuse me for saying that I think you carry hocus-pocus a little too far. Hocus-pocus has its advantages, and when the spirits are in question no doubt it is indispensable. But as to making a mystery about whether Sir Rupert Lowry caused a will to be witnessed in London on a certain day or not—I assure you this is a prosaic country of policemen, and newspapers, and so forth, and there can be no difficulty in verifying such a fact as that without troubling the spirits on the subject."

"Why, you wouldn't have got so far as the beginning of an idea that there was another will made in London if it hadn't been for the spirits!" returned Flagge, striking the palm of his hand on the table. "And now you've got the idea, I should like to know how you are going to verify it. If it's so uncommon easy, I wonder you took the trouble to come here at all."

"I've no objection to gratify your curiosity, Mr. Flagge. The means I should take to

verify the fact in question would be—simply to put an advertisement in *The Times*, begging any one who witnessed such a will to come forward.”

This was a sudden inspiration suggested by his own mention of “newspapers” amongst the things to be met with in this prosaic country.

“Well, just look here, Sir Cosmo Lowry. I don’t belong to the aristocratic classes myself, and time is money with me. I’m a child of natur’, raised among the wild tribes of the West, and unaccustomed to the trammels of conventionality, and it just comes to this:—if you’ve got any proposition to make, I’ll be happy to listen to you; if not, it don’t matter one d—n to me what you do!”

With that Flagge re-lit his cigar, and began to smoke with long vigorous puffs.

This was by no means the kind of tone which Sir Cosmo had looked for. He had expected to find a supple, smooth-tongued charlatan, who would wheedle and flatter, and try to mystify him; and he had promised himself the pleasure of opposing sharp, sarcastic speeches to the charlatan’s blandishments, and utterly getting the better of him. But Sir Cosmo’s weapons were useless here—

needles against granite. Flagge's manner was rough and reckless. He had certainly never exhibited this side of his character at the mansion in Green Street. Sir Cosmo felt a burning desire to conclude the colloquy by throwing the coffee-pot at the "medium's" head, and walking out of the room. Instead of doing so, however, he said—prefacing his words by a prolonged and contemptuous sniff, "I suppose 'conventionality' means 'civility' out West?"

"Dunno but it may, sometimes. It sometimes means useless palaver, anyhow. And as to civility—it seems to me that to come into a man's house and tell him to his face he's a humbug—for that's what you meant, neither more nor less, when you said you didn't believe in 'my spirits'—is scarcely good manners. But I don't go in for manners myself."

"To come to the point, Mr. Flagge—I think you ask too much money."

"Can't take less."

"And then—you're asking me to buy a pig in a poke. Is that the way you children of Nature deal with each other in the West?"

"We call it spekilation."

"It would come much cheaper to advertise in *The Times*, you know."

“And cheaper still not to advertise at all! That is, unless you expect to get a lump of money under a new will. Lady Lowry seemed to think there was reason to believe your father had changed his mind about the way he'd leave his property shortly before he died. However, that's your business, not mine.”

“What do the spirits say about it?”

“They advise me not to sell my information except for ready money.”

“H'm! You're a sharp practitioner, Mr. Flagge! Couldn't one buy a sample?”

“A sample! You've had no end of samples for nothing, or at least your wife has. Ask her what I've told her about your father's life here in London. Not but what I guess she has repeated it all to you already. How do you s'pose I got all those partic'lars? Or rather, for that's the main point, how could you have got 'em without me? I reckon you might have 'advertised' considerable of a time 'fore you'd have arrived at much worth having.”

“And do you really—I ask from curiosity—do you really mean to say it's the spirits who have told you what you know? Is that the theory you seriously advance?”

“I don't advance any theory at all, Sir



Cosmo Lowry. My opinions are my own—my private property. I just set the facts before you, and you've got to account for 'em best way you can."

"And do you believe that a will was made by my father, Sir Rupert Lowry, subsequently to the one dated two years before his death?"

"I don't *believe* it, I know it."

"That sounds very extraordinary."

"It *is* very extraordinary."

"But my father may have made and destroyed a dozen wills during the last two years of his life, for aught I know."

Sir Cosmo's hands were playing irresolutely with one of his gloves. Flagge observed him with a peculiar feline nonchalance, like a cat sure of its spring. He was convinced that thenceforward the only question would be about the terms; and the result justified his prevision.

After some haggling Cosmo agreed to pay him half the sum asked, on the day when he (Sir Cosmo) should be brought face to face with the person who had witnessed his father's will, and the other half as soon as certain information should be obtained that the will was still in existence, and where it was.

No sooner had he left Howard Buildings

than Sir Cosmo began to repent of his bargain, and to feel heartily ashamed of having made it. He to be caught by a quack like that! But he told my lady that he thought he had "managed the medium" pretty satisfactorily. "No song, no supper, Sally. If he don't give us information worth having, he gets not a farthing out of me. I think my money's pretty safe at that rate," said Sir Cosmo. And then he began to consider within himself as to the best way of carrying out certain alterations in the stables at Lowry, *in case* the house should come to him, and *in case* the new will should furnish him with the means of improving it.

## CHAPTER XI.

ALL things considered, Flagge thought it the best plan to take Mr. Quickit to Sir Cosmo's house. He had debated the question whether he should not rather ask Sir Cosmo to meet Quickit at Howard Buildings; but had finally resolved that the objections to that scheme were greater than to the other. There were certain things which he much desired Quickit to leave unsaid in his colloquy with the baronet, but Quickit was not amenable to Dr. Flagge's hints and recommendations. And, after all, thought the medium, it would matter little if Sir Cosmo arrived at the conclusion that it was Quickit who had furnished all the details respecting Sir Rupert which Flagge had communicated to Lady Lowry. Sir Cosmo did not believe in the spirits as it was. But his wife did, and that was the main thing.

One evening, about nine o'clock, Dr. Flagge

and Mr. Quickit were ushered into Sir Cosmo's study, and received by the baronet alone.

"This," said Flagge, walking in without any ceremony of salutation, "is the gentleman who can confirm the information I gave you, Sir Cosmo Lowry." Flagge behaved to Sir Cosmo in a cool, defensive sort of way, like a man who has got hold of an animal which he can thoroughly master, but only by dint of cautious and unrelaxing watchfulness.

"Oh!" said Sir Cosmo. "Take a seat."

"Thank you; thank you, Sir Cosmo. Happy to make your acquaintance. I had the honour of knowing your lamented father for several years—se—veral years," and Mr. Quickit sat down, and rubbed his hands and looked at the baronet with his head on one side. To do honour to the occasion Mr. Quickit had washed his face, and put on a clean collar. The portions of skin and shirt adjacent to these, when a movement of Mr. Quickit's head and throat permitted them to be seen, displayed a deeper tone of colouring. But this evidence of his habitual disregard for soap and water made his concession to other people's prejudice in their favour all the more complimentary. Mr. Quickit had performed a perfunctory sort of ablution, much as poten-

tates politely wear the crosses or decorations of each others' country when they meet. The complete costume of the order would be, indeed, too cumbrous and inconvenient to go about one's affairs in ; but a star or a ribbon serves quite as well for a symbol of civility and consideration.

But, though minded to be civil, Mr. Quickit was not in the least servile, and was perhaps more incapable of feeling himself awed by his superiors in rank than most men.

"Oh, you knew my father, did you? How did you come to know him, Mr. ——?"

"Quickit! Ha, ha, ha, Mr. Quickit. Your father, Sir Cosmo, lodged in my house whenever he came to London during several years."

"Where is your house?"

"Howard Buildings, Strand."

"Oh! Where Flagge lives?"

"Precisely."

"A queer place for my father to lodge in."

"Not at all! Not in the least queer, Sir Cosmo! A most judicious choice of situation, on the contrary, ha, ha, ha! But your lamented and respected father was judicious—highly so."

"H'm! When was the last time you saw Sir Rupert?"

“The last time I saw Sir Rupert was in July, to the best of my recollection. Yes; it was July; Parliament was still sitting, I remember; and I can recall asking your father if he was going to Westminster to hear the debate on some interesting topic of the day—just as a joke, merely a joke, you know; and he replied that he had his own business to attend to, and that if every man would do as much, there’d be no need of Parliament at all! Or something to that effect, ha, ha, ha! Your lamented father was a man of great energy of character.”

“July, eh? Why, that was only a short time before he died!”

“Between five and six weeks before he died, Sir Cosmo. I saw the death in the papers.”

“I suppose he was a good deal broken and enfeebled when you saw him last?”

“Nothing of the kind, Sir Cosmo! Nothing of the kind. His vigour was remarkable—quite remarkable.”

“His vigour of body, I suppose you mean?”

“By no means exclusively of body. Certainly not. His mind was active and clear as ever. I never saw a man less ‘broken,’ and

as for being 'enfeebled,' it is about the very last epithet I should think of applying to him! He was a man, in the words of our immortal bard (who had a considerable acquaintance with his own species, Sir Cosmo), 'take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again!' Ha, ha, ha?"

Sir Cosmo, who was standing all this time with his back to the fire, glanced quickly at Flagge, and then turned round and stood with the toe of his boot on the fender and his back towards Quickit. Flagge had seated himself astride of a chair, with his elbows resting on the back of it, and had watched Sir Cosmo unwinkingly during the whole interview. "Well," said he, "guess you find my statements pretty accurate, Sir Cosmo Lowry. Your father was in full possession of all his faculties up to the last. And no arrangement that he made can be set aside or altered except by later evidence under his own hand. It won't do for any party or parties to say, 'Oh, but the old man was failing in his intellects.' We must find something stronger than that, or things have got to stay as they are. And that's just exactly what Sir Rupert was saying to me only last evening. His communications were marked by uncommon vigour, and I

thought he'd have broke a solid rosewood table in the exuberance of his manifestations."

Sir Cosmo made an impatient gesture of contempt. "I thought we had agreed to drop all that nonsense, Mr. Flagge," he said.

"Well, Sir Cosmo, we might conclude not to allow the electric fluid to circulate through the atmosphere, but I don't know as our agreement would amount to much. Guess the 'lectrical phenomena would go on pretty much the same. And so do the spirits. A good many folks have 'agreed to drop that nonsense.' Only it won't be dropped. That's so."

"Look here, Mr. Quickit," said Sir Cosmo, turning round again, so as to face the two men, "we needn't waste any more time. I've got a simple question to ask you, to which you can give me a straightforward answer. Did my father make a will in your house within two years of his death? You can answer that—Yes or No!"

"Not at all, Sir Cosmo. As it happens, I cannot answer that with 'Yes' or 'No.' By no means. The fact is, that I don't know whether your father did or did not make a will in my house, ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Flagge met Sir Cosmo's look with one



of cool security. "Just you go easy, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said he. "Our friend Mr. Quickit is extremely accurate. He ain't a-going to be driven a furlong further'n he sees his way ; nor yet to be hurried."

"Hurried? I very seldom find any one who wants to go quicker than my pace, Dr. Flagge. I keep the steam up pretty well on most occasions, sir. I go as fast as most people, but I won't run my head against a stone wall, ha, ha, ha! Not at all. By no mans. Cer—tain—ly not."

Sir Cosmo's face expressed bad temper and perturbation, but most of all, perhaps, disappointment. Flagge, taking mental notes of his physiognomy, remarked to himself, "He'd set his heart on getting the information more'n I imagined even. If he wasn't deadly disappointed he'd never smile so much, nor his nostrils wouldn't look so pinched. I might have had another hundred dollars." Then he said aloud—

"Mr. Quickit don't know, you see, whether your father made a will in his house or not."

"So I find. Well—in that case it was hardly worth while to give him the trouble of coming here merely that I might have the pleasure of making his acquaintance. We

shall neither of us find it answer, I'm afraid," returned Sir Cosmo, with a sneer of such undisguised bitterness and contempt as fairly astonished Mr. Quickit. The latter had no intention of submitting to be treated with rudeness, however, and he immediately got up from his chair, saying, "That's enough, Sir Cosmo, quite enough. I did not seek the honour of coming here, sir. I have no wish to force myself upon any one. I have a fair share of common sense, and I am too busy a man, besides, to run about in search of acquaintances out of my own line altogether. I wish you a good evening, Sir Cosmo."

"Hold hard, Quickit!" cried Dr. Flagge. "You go ahead at such an infernal pace there's no keeping up with you. Sir Cosmo Lowry don't rightly understand what the information is that you can give him. He has jumped to the conclusion that you can give him none at all, which is a mistake."

"Sir Cosmo Lowry has made more than one mistake, I dare say. Good evening."

Flagge caught him by the coat-tails. "Thunder! What an almighty hurry you're in! Just come along here and sit down again. You're a good-natured kind of man, you know, and you ain't a-going to refuse to give informa-

tion that may be important to a great many people, not you ! ”

Sir Cosmo's brows were knitted savagely. Various sarcasms hovered on his tongue. He longed to bid the two men not to endeavour to enhance the value of what they had to say by any further “palaver” or “acting,” but his anxiety to hear what Quickit could tell him overcame the impulse to give vent to his temper. Flagge had read his face aright. He had set his heart on getting the information. And as to the bitter speeches, they would not be wasted. They would keep, and could be expended at some future period. So he waited, and looked from Flagge to Quickit and from Quickit to Flagge, breathing hard through his nostrils, but saying no word.

“You'll have, I reckon, to change the form of your inquiry, Sir Cosmo Lowry,” said Flagge. “Mr. Quickit is nat'rally tenacious of exactitude dooring an inquiry of this kind. You didn't put your question so as it could be answered by a negative or affirmative right away. You asked did Sir Rupert make a will in Mr. Quickit's house within two years of his death. Well, Mr. Quickit don't know ! But just you ask if Mr. Quickit witnessed a will for your father in his own house. You've got

to make your questions clear as print, I tell you, for our friend Quickit."

"H'm! Well, Mr. Quickit, did my father, Sir Rupert Lowry, get you to witness his will when he was lodging in your house, at any period within two years of his death? I hope that's sufficiently categorical!"

"Yes, Sir Cosmo, he did so."

Cosmo was standing with his back to the fire again, and his elbows resting on the chimney-piece. When he heard Quickit's answer, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and clenched them tightly, out of sight there.

"Can you remember the date?"

"I can remember it within a day or two, because it was just before Sir Rupert went back to the country. It must have been about the end of the first week of July last."

"Of course you—you have no idea whether my father destroyed that will or not? Old men at his time of life will sometimes go on making new wills, and destroying them again directly, day after day."

"What he did when he got back to his home, I can't say, of course. But up to the time he left my house, I *can* say, as it happens, that he had not destroyed the will."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, Sir Cosmo. He did not tell me so. But when he was just going away, I was talking with him on a little matter of business which is neither here nor there——"

"Had *you* business transactions with my father?" interrupted Cosmo, with quick suspicion.

"Which, as I say, is neither here nor there," continued Quickit, "neither—here—nor—there; and the table was covered with papers and so forth, and Sir Rupert opened a little despatch-box he travelled with, to look for a document, and showed me the paper I had witnessed lying there. 'There's your sign manual, Mr. Quickit,' said he. And there it was, 'Mark Anthony Quickit,' in my identical handwriting."

"I reckon that's pretty satisfactory, Sir Cosmo Lowry," said Flagge. "P'raps, on the whole, it's a darned sight more satisfactory than you expected! Our friend Mr. Quickit is a man of very remarkable smartness and clearness of intellect. I'm a pretty good judge of men—I oughter! I've known considerable of a variety of 'em, from the Appanawchees, eastward,—and I'm not acquainted with a smarter man than Marcus A. Quickit, I tell *you*."

Sir Cosmo was highly excited. His hands

twitched nervously in his pockets, and his lips were pressed more tightly together than usual ; But his excitement did not make him "expansive." Indeed, Sir Cosmo's emotions were seldom of that beneficent or sunshiny nature which may be allowed to burst forth unchecked. They resembled, rather, explosive material very dangerous to set a light to. Flagge was triumphant. Quickit, urged on by a desire to show Sir Cosmo Lowry how important was the information he was able to give, and how entirely whatever obligation there was in the matter lay on the baronet's side, had given fuller and more precise details than Flagge had expected or hoped for. Let these particulars come from what source they might, they were of very high interest and value to Sir Cosmo, and without Flagge's assistance Sir Cosmo could not have obtained them. That much was clear ; and the contingent "dollars" were, he felt satisfied, assured to him.

After a little pause, Sir Cosmo said, " Oh ! Well, there's nothing to show that my father did not tear up that will, or light his pipe with it, directly he got home to Lowry." And after another, shorter pause, he added, awkwardly, " Much obliged to you."

Mr. Quickit stood up, pulled a large silver

watch from his pocket, looked at it, and said that he must be going homeward as to-morrow was Saturday, and there were accounts to be made up for the Castor and Pollux.

“Won’t you—ahem!—is there any remuneration to be given to Mr. Quickit for his trouble?” said Sir Cosmo, speaking to Flagge.

Quickit answered for himself. “I did not come here with a view of obtaining remuneration, Sir Cosmo,” he said. “I could not afford to be out of pocket, and should have charged the cab to you, if Dr. Flagge had not undertaken to settle it. I thought it my duty to state the truth in this matter, so far as I know it. Besides, I had a respect for your father, Sir Rupert Lowry. He was a gentleman of great force of character, always sure of his own position, and understanding other people’s. I shall now take my leave, Sir Cosmo, merely adding that my time is of value, and that I shall be unable to wait on you again—unless, indeed, upon strictly business terms—ha! ha! ha! *Good evening.*”

With that, Mr. Quickit, whose actions were never wavering or undecided, walked out of the study, through the hall, and out at the hall-door, which they heard him close sharply and firmly behind him.

“Now, Sir Cosmo,” said Flagge, looking coolly into the baronet’s face, “before going any further, you and I will settle *our* little account. I reckon you’ll scarcely deny that I’ve done well for you so far—and got Quickit for nothing, too. Better than *advertising*, eh, Sir Cosmo Lowry ? ”



## CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT a fortnight before Christmas Mrs. Flint arrived in London, and went to pay a visit in Green Street the very next day. She asked for Miss Lowry, and was shown into Mary's dressing-room, where she enjoyed an uninterrupted chat with her favourite. But before going away she asked Mary to present her to Lady Lowry. "I cannot come into Lady Lowry's house and ignore her existence, and I shall have to make her acquaintance some of these days in any case," she said with an air of not very flattering resignation.

Mary conducted Mrs. Flint to the drawing-room, and went herself in search of her sister-in-law, who at that hour would probably be in her boudoir, she said.

Mrs. Flint had sat but a minute or so, critically surveying the room, and perfectly appreciating all the indications it afforded of the character of its mistress, when she became

aware that there was some one in the adjoining room, which was divided from the main drawing-room by means of folding-doors. There was, besides, a velvet curtain hung on the side of the larger room, and this, of course, muffled all noises. Still, as the folding-doors were ajar, some sound of voices came to Mrs. Flint's ear, although she could only distinguish a word or two here and there. The voices were those of a man and a woman.

After some undistinguishable murmurings the man's voice was raised, and said, "My dear girl, I was much distressed when I heard of your illness. I wish I could carry you off to a warm climate for the winter."

Then the woman's voice murmured a reply, and the man exclaimed, "Pray don't speak so! You know that you can believe in *my* affection for you, do you not?"

Mrs. Flint here gave a loud and elaborate cough in her deepest notes, and the voices ceased. Almost immediately a thin white hand parted the velvet hangings, and a thin white face looked into the drawing-room. Then Cenone Balasso came forward, and saluted Mrs. Flint.

"I am waiting for Miss Lowry," said that

matron. "I am Mrs. Flint from Elcaster." And she wondered in her heart who the strange girl might be. She did not certainly correspond to the descriptions of Rosamond.

"Oh yes; Miss Lowry expected you," returned Enone, with grave, unsmiling courtesy. Then she looked back into the smaller room, and said, "Major Maude, this lady is an old friend of Miss Lowry's. I have often heard her speak of Mrs. Flint."

Upon this, a tall, bearded man walked forward and bowed.

This, then, was Major Maude! Why that, Mrs. Flint was certain, was the name of the young officer whom Samuel and she remembered at Lowry Place years ago, and of whom they had been speaking together only the other day! Why on earth was he there in a confidential *tête-à-tête* with this young girl? And how very odd that he, whom Samuel supposed to be a devoted lover of Mary Lowry, should be assuring this sprite-like young creature with the great eyes, of his unalterable affection! However, Mrs. Flint returned the Major's salutation graciously, and looked at him curiously. Yes, he was a fine-looking man, well set up, with a good, strong, gentle face, and all the outward pre-

sentment of a gentleman in every respect. But a great deal more than all that was required, in Mrs. Flint's estimation, from any one who should aspire to woo Mary Lowry. And then, moreover, it was certainly not Mary Lowry whom Major Maude had just been assuring of his affection.

Ænone glided quietly out of the room, and then Mrs. Flint asked of the Major who that young lady was.

"She is Miss Ænone Balassapoulo, more commonly called by her friends and acquaintances Nona Balasso."

"Oh! A foreigner?"

"A Greek—or partly Greek, by race; but almost English now by education."

"Oh! Yes; she seems to speak English fluently. Ahem!"

"Your name is very familiar to me, Mrs. Flint. And, if I mistake not, we have met before, although it is not likely you should remember me."

"I think I do remember you, though. You were at Lowry Place for a short time eleven or twelve years ago, I think?"

"Yes, I am surprised you should remember anything about me. I have been knocked about the world so much since then, and been

so bronzed and buffeted, that I should think there is little left of my old face, Mrs. Flint."

"Well, perhaps I might not have recognized your face. But we—I—in short I recalled your name when I heard it."

"You have been paying a visit to Miss Lowry?" said Maude, not so much for the sake of getting an answer as for the pleasure of speaking about Mary, although his heart beat with so warm and eager a pulse at the utterance of her name as to flush his honest face up to the roots of his bronze-coloured hair.

"Yes; I have been to see my dear and valued friend, Miss Lowry. She is looking beautiful, of course; that is a matter of course. But I find her a little pale, and a trifle thinner, I fancy, than when she left Clevenal."

"Do you? Do you think she is not well?"

"Perhaps not exactly unwell,—she has a magnificent constitution; almost all the Lowrys have. Sir Cosmo takes more after his mother, who was delicate in that respect, although he don't resemble her in anything else——"

Maude was not interested in the delicacy of Sir Cosmo's constitution. "You were saying

that Miss Lowry looked pale and thin?" he hinted.

"It may be only my fancy, but I did think so. I want to get her home among people who appreciate her. She is not appreciated by vulgar-minded persons."

Maude rightly concluded that this shaft was levelled at Lady Lowry; and although he cordially concurred in the sentiment, he thought it would not become him to pursue the subject. "I should have thought," said he, "that every one who knew Miss Lowry must admire, and—and—love her."

"Oh, she *is* admired and loved I assure you, Major Maude, by half the county in her own home. But the fact is—— I don't know whether you're a particular friend of Lady Lowry?"

"I have only the honour of a slight and recent acquaintance with her, madam."

"Ah! Well, my acquaintance with her has yet to be begun—personally, that is to say. But I believe I know enough about her to form a judgment on certain points, and I am much afraid that she is not able to value Miss Lowry as she ought to be valued;—and as she *is* valued by people of her own class and breeding."

Mrs. Flint had become warm, and paused to fan herself with her card-case.

"One might suppose that a fairly good heart would suffice to make people recognize Miss Lowry's fine qualities, even without much breeding," said Vincent Maude softly.

"Well, there's a great deal in blood," returned Mrs. Flint, thinking with bitterness on Sir Cosmo's *mésalliance*. "And however amiable Miss Lowry may be, she can't but think so. She wouldn't be a Lowry if she could."

Major Maude made no answer. And after a very brief silence, Mrs. Flint went on to hint in pretty plain terms at the brilliant position which Miss Lowry might attain if she would; and the honours waiting to be laid at her feet if she would but deign to accept them. Mrs. Flint had received a general impression that all these London people,—and especially these in Green Street,—required setting to rights on the subject of Mary Lowry's claims on their respect and admiration. As to my lady, Mrs. Flint told herself that no proper appreciation of Mary could be expected from *her*; and yet she was clearly irritated and offended at every indication of my lady's obtuseness. Here was this Major Maude, too, talking sentiment

and affection to a queer-looking foreign girl with big eyes, instead of dying for Mary Lowry as Samuel had imagined! To be sure, Major Maude would not be a match worthy of that peerless lady. But that was no reason why he should not languish for her; which would, Mrs. Flint thought, have been much more creditable to his character and discernment than were his present goings on. So, moved by these considerations, Mrs. Flint did her best to let Major Maude understand how infinitely precious a jewel was shining unvalued in Sir Cosmo's house, and how highly the jewel was valued elsewhere.

Vincent listened in silence. It was the first time that he had ever heard Mary's praises without a warm glow of pleasure. But now it must be owned they depressed him strangely. And Mrs. Flint, taking his silence and sad look for want of sympathy, spared no pains to impress him with the grandeur and ardour of the suitors who would—(Mrs. Flint was morally convinced they would!)—crowd around Mary Lowry so soon as she could return to her ancestral home.

There was ample time for the good lady to expatiate on her theme before the mistress of the house appeared to interrupt her. My lady



was minded to "begin as she meant to go on," to use her own phrase; and did not intend to pay Mrs. Flint, the lawyer's wife, the compliment of appearing to be in any hurry to receive her. At length, however, she swept into the room, and greeted Mrs. Flint with a condescending bow.

"How do you do?" said my lady. And then she sat down, and held out her hand to Major Maude.

"I came to see Nona, Lady Lowry," said Maude.

"So I supposed. Well, did they send her to you?"

"Yes; I have just been speaking with her. She is far from well. I am not satisfied with her state at all."

"Oh, she'll do well enough. Don't you worry yourself!"

"She is in a morbid, nervous state of mind."

"Oh, she'll do very well. As to being thin—to be sure, she is a bag of bones, but that don't always show delicacy. Some plump persons are far more delicate, although they may not look it."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Flint sat by in no meek or conciliatory frame of mind. At the first pause she spoke—

"I was unwilling to leave your house, Lady Lowry, without paying you the compliment of asking to see you. But I will not intrude on you longer. You seem to have private matters to discuss with ~~this~~ gentleman; and, as my visit was really to Miss Lowry, and I have seen her, I may as well take my leave."

"Oh! Hadn't you better stay till Mary comes back? She's gone to find Rosamond, I think," returned my lady, quite unmoved by Mrs. Flint's reproachful majesty of demeanour.

"Well, I should like to see Rosamond," said Mrs. Flint. "I knew Sir Cosmo when he was much younger than she is; and Sir Cosmo's dear mother—the sweetest lady in the world. She was an angel!"

"She was a Miss Hovenden," observed my lady gravely. "Oh, I know all about her."

"I hope Sir Cosmo is well," said Mrs. Flint. She had never brought herself to discard Sir Cosmo from her regard so completely as her husband had done. Cosmo came of the old stock, and must surely possess some indefeasible virtues by right of that fact!

"He's pretty well, thank you."

"He and I are very old friends."

"Oh, for that matter, I suppose he knew

everybody in Clevenal and Elcaster more or less when he was a boy."

"His family were universally respected in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, of course."

"Yes; Clevenal folks are old-fashioned enough to think a good deal of long descent. And the Lowrys were allied with the best blood in the country. I believe in London these matters are not so much considered. However a Lowry—a born Lowry—will, of course, hold his own everywhere with people of any breeding."

Even my lady's tough moral integument was pervious to the meaning of this. She reddened, and looked hard at Mrs. Flint with a sulky defiance. Maude gently tried to change the subject. "There must be many alterations in your part of the world, Mrs. Flint, since we met there years ago," said he.

"Some alterations, of course. But, as I was saying, Clevenal folks are old-fashioned folks, and don't change quickly."

"You never told me about your visit to Lowry, Major Maude," said my lady condescendingly, shaking her fore-finger. "But I have heard all about it. You were very sly and close, but a little bird tells me a great many things."

Maude blushed like a schoolboy. "I did not know that you would do me the honour to take any interest in the matter, Lady Lowry," said he. "I should not have ventured to bore you with it."

"Well, considering that you went to Lowry as an act of friendship to Sir Cosmo—Mr. Lowry he was in those days—you might give her ladyship credit for being grateful enough to feel some interest in the matter!" said Mrs. Flint. "The Lowrys always had good memories both for favours and injuries. And although Lady Lowry does not come of their race, we must suppose she has learnt to be Lowry enough not to forget a kindness shown to the family."

Sarah thought this speech monstrously presumptuous. What did the woman mean by interfering, and talking about the private affairs of the Lowry family in this free and easy fashion? And Mrs. Flint's personal antagonism to herself was not lost upon my lady. She resented it quite as much as if she had received the stranger with the most cordial courtesy. Indeed, my lady never measured the behaviour of other people to her by the standard of her own behaviour to them. There existed in her mind a sort of original

premiss—a first principle not to be disputed, or even discussed—to the effect that a great deal of civility was due from everybody to Sarah, Lady Lowry; and another minor assumption which seemed in some way to spring from the first, that any civility shown by her to others was not a duty, but a bounty.

When Mary reappeared, accompanied by Rosamond, matters were not much mended. Mrs. Flint's genial manner to Miss Lowry and her niece was so strongly contrasted with her frozen manner to Lady Lowry as to verge on burlesque. But Mrs. Flint was in very angry earnest, and was resolved that Lady Lowry should for once be treated with the contempt she merited. "An impudent, ignorant, thick-headed dairymaid!" was Mrs. Flint's mental verdict on her hostess. "She ought to have a good setting down to bring her to her senses!"

But to a sense of her own inferiority to persons of gentle breeding there was small chance of bringing our Sarah. And Mrs. Flint went away in a state of open hostility to Sir Cosmo's wife. "I hope you will try to come and see me, dear Miss Lowry," she said, "and bring Rosamond with you. Otherwise I fear I shall not see you any more during my

stay in London, for I scarcely think I can come here again."

"You are staying a long way off?" said Mary.

"Oh, it isn't only the distance, my dear."

"There are plenty of omnibuses plying between South Brompton and this part of the world. I often see them when I am driving out in my carriage," observed Lady Lowry.

Mrs. Flint disdained to notice this clumsy thrust. "Do come, dear Miss Lowry," she said. "The friend I am staying with would be only too delighted to receive you. She has heard me speak of you so much."

"Of course I shall come to see you."

"Mrs. Hautecombe is a very old friend of mine, and a charming old lady. My father held a living in her father's diocese."

"Hautecombe? She must be the widow of my old Colonel!" exclaimed Maude.

"Why, Mrs. Percival Wigmore's aunt is a Mrs. Hautecombe, and lives in Brompton," said Rosamond. "I have heard him talk about going to see her. He always tells people where he goes and whom he sees, whether they care to know or not."

The daughter of a Bishop, the widow of a Colonel, and the aunt of "an Honourable!"

Lady Lowry was surprised, but was equal to the occasion. "Mary can have the carriage to go and see you, and Rosamond may come too," she said, with the deliberate gravity of a judge summing up. "As for me, you will excuse me; I am not equal just now to paying many visits."

"Certainly, Lady Lowry, I shall excuse you from returning my call. To say the truth, I had not the least expectation of your doing so. I wish you good morning."

"Hautecombe," murmured my lady, fingering the pages of the Red Book, whilst Mrs. Flint was yet descending the stairs. "Oh, here it is! 'Alberic, sixth baronet—second son, George—married Maria, eldest daughter of'—why then she *is* Percival Wigmore's aunt! Dear me! However did Mrs. Flint come to know her, I wonder! I almost think I *will* call."

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE fact that Sir Rupert Lowry had made a will subsequent to the one proved and acted upon seemed to be ascertained to his son's satisfaction. But when he had got thus far, Sir Cosmo found himself not much advanced towards the bettering of his fortunes. Before-hand he had said to himself that when once he should be assured of the fact that his father had made a will within a year of his death he would have made a great stride towards his goal. But now he knew, or thought he knew, that fact, and the goal seemed to be as far off as ever. It is a common experience: a kind of optical delusion with which Hope is wont to cheat us. We all know how near the mountain tops look when we start to reach them, and how provokingly—even maliciously—they recede as we climb. Here was Sir Cosmo in possession of his coveted fact, wondering how it was possible that he could



ever have thought it would do him any good to get at it!

Not so my lady. She was satisfied with the result of the interview with Mr. Quickit, as detailed to her by her husband, and was not sparing of triumphant "I told you so's!"

"Well! And what then?" cried Sir Cosmo testily. "Supposing that we knew with certainty that my father made a will the very day before he died,—what then?"

He desired nothing better than to believe as Sarah believed, but the very strength of his desire made him affect a sort of contemptuous incredulity.

"Well, then, the next thing is to find out where the will is," returned my lady stolidly.

"Really! You don't say so! Only that? Nothing easier, of course!"

"Well, Cosmo, easy or difficult, that is the next thing. You thought at first, you know, that we should never find out that your father did make a will so lately; but we have. And as the spirits have done that much for us, we ought to have faith that they'll do more."

"The spirits have got bodies attached to them, and breeches pockets of a rather insatiable sort."

"Of course you must pay something for

information. You would have to pay six-and-eightpence for only asking an attorney the commonest question. I know; because father went into Lambrook once to speak to Mr. Sprott, the lawyer, about a right of way. And I'm sure Mr. Sprott couldn't have told you what Dr. Flagge has told you."

"Can Flagge tell me whether that will my father made in London was destroyed or not?"

"He is pretty sure it wasn't."

"Pretty sure! He makes a pretty guess. I could guess myself, if that were all."

"But when you did guess,—about your father having made the will, or not having made it,—you guessed wrong, you know! And all because you wouldn't believe what the spirits said. If you don't take care, your father will be quite offended, and won't give us any more manifestations. I wouldn't if I was him, and so I tell you, Cosmo!"

"I'm sick of the whole business. I shall wash my hands of it. I'm ashamed to hear you talk the d—d nonsense you do about it."

"You won't be ashamed to take the money when we get it, Cosmo," returned my lady without any ironical intention. "And if you ask *me* what ought to be done, I say there

ought to be a thorough search made at Lowry Place, *in your presence*. What became of that will? You don't suppose your sister destroyed it, do you?"

"Sarah! My sister Mary Lowry——!"

"Well, women have done such things before now, and I dare say they were somebody's sisters! However, I'm not accusing any one. Only I say, if the will wasn't destroyed it's in Lowry Place; and if it's in Lowry Place it can be found by looking."

"All my father's papers *were* looked through——"

"Who by?"

"By Mr. Flint and my sister."

"Mr. Flint? Oh yes; Mr. Flint!"

"And they were all found to be in perfect order. His desk and writing-table were sealed up, and even his study was locked, and the key kept in Flint's office at Elcaster until my arrival."

"*You* didn't see the papers examined."

"Besides—you talk very much at your ease of looking through Lowry Place, but you seem to forget that Lowry Place belongs to my sister, and that I have no right to go and search her house."

"Not without her leave, I suppose."

“And how could I have the face to ask her leave for any such purpose?”

“I don’t see why not. *I* shouldn’t mind asking!”

Then Sir Cosmo walked out of the room, angry, humiliated, troubled by suspicions that he was ashamed of,—troubled, too, by involuntary sentiments of respect and confidence which he grudged,—but feeling, nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart a hope that Sarah’s expectations would be fulfilled, and a conviction that Sarah would do her utmost towards their fulfilment untrammelled by scruples.

This conviction was certainly well founded. But before Sarah proceeded to active measures she thought it desirable to consult the spirits. Accordingly, she sent for Dr. Flagge, and desired him to obtain Sir Rupert Lowry’s opinion as to what had better be done next. “You can make Miss Balasso clairvoyant, you know. Sir Rupert always communicates more clearly by her mouth than by any one else’s, or by the table, or writing, or anything,” said my lady.

Flagge had not seen Enone since the day of his declaration to her; and he now paused, revolving in his mind his course of action. Lady Lowry’s proposition gave him a chance

of having a private interview with C  none, which he could not bear to let slip. After a minute's reflection, he told Lady Lowry that he would try to do as she wished ; but that he advised her to send for C  none without letting her know that he was there. "And," said he, with an almost imperceptible hesitation, "I think you'd better let me see her alone first. She has taken a kind of an antipathy to me lately. Such whims are not uncommon with mesmeric patients. But I can influence her if I'm left to do it my own way."

"I have no patience with a person in Miss Balasso's position presuming to give herself airs," said my lady. Nevertheless she complied with Flagge's suggestion, and leaving him in her boudoir, betook herself with no very gracious mien to Sir Cosmo's library, which was then untenanted ; and at the same time she sent a message to Miss Balasso requesting her to come downstairs forthwith.

Mary, Rosamond, and C  none were together in the dressing-room of the former. C  none passed hours there now, sitting with her hands holding an unopened book upon her lap before her, and neither speaking nor moving. Rosamond had just been making a sort of *amende honorable*. That outspoken young lady had

declared on several occasions that she couldn't bear Dr. Flagge: that she was sure all the mesmerizing had made Nona ill: and that Dr. Flagge talked nonsense on purpose to deceive people, and even,—she added with her frank eyes full of honest indignation,—even told right-down stories! But now she had to own that Dr. Flagge showed a great deal of feeling about Ænone, and had inquired about her health every day since her fainting fit. And she said as much to her Aunt Mary and to Ænone herself. “Do you know that yesterday, when that tiresome Mr. Wigmore was in Lady Lowry's boudoir,—but after all, even Mr. Wigmore showed kindness and feeling for Nona! Everybody showed feeling except—— Well, I won't say any more, Aunt Mary. But do you know, Nona, that yesterday when Dr. Flagge asked after you, there were tears in his eyes! Real, actual tears! I almost liked him when I saw them.”

“I don't want his tears.”

“No, of course you don't *want* Dr. Flagge to cry about you! But although it may seem a little queer and different from our ways, still it shows that he is not quite a selfish stone, like some people.”

“You know that I have no favourable

opinion of the man," said Mary, "but I do believe he is touched and remorseful at the idea that his tricks and mesmerizings, and the rest, may have injured your health, Ænone."

Ænone gave a strange look—a smile that was sadder than tears. "His mesmerism has done me no harm," she answered.

"How can you know that, my child? You are not strong, and your nervous system has been completely over-excited."

But to all such speeches Ænone made no other answer than the strange smile which moved her lips, and left her forehead drawn into folds of painful thought.

Such a look was on her face when the servant brought a message to the effect that Lady Lowry desired to speak with her in the boudoir.

"I wonder what she wants!" cried Miss Rosamond. "I dare say it's something of no consequence at all. Ought Nona to be made to go up and down stairs when she's so weak? Ought she now, Aunt Mary?"

But Ænone rose at once, and bade the man say that she would come immediately.

"I think I know the business Lady Lowry wants to speak to me about," she said. "I have asked her to get music lessons for me.

Mrs. Wigmore thought she might recommend me. I cannot remain here. I have told Lady Lowry so."

"Why will you not accept my offer, and come down to Lowry with me for a while?" said Mary. But Enone merely shook her head with a slight haughty gesture, and left the room. She had not yet closed the door behind her when she returned, and taking Mary's hand between her own hands, raised it to her lips. "I am not so base as to be ungrateful," she said; and was gone again.

Meanwhile Flagge was pacing up and down the boudoir, turning and turning in the narrow space like a beast in a cage. He could not sit still. He could not stand still. All his peculiar coolness of manner had deserted him;—that peculiar manner which seemed the result of a certain phlegmatic indifference of mind, combined with irritable nerves and emotions. He was restless, anxious, self-distrustful. Yet at the same time there was an almost fierce gleam in his eyes, like the eyes of a man who, although he would scarcely have force to take a desperate resolution, yet might very easily yield to a desperate impulse. All at once he stopped near the door, and placed himself so that a person



entering the room would not at once see him. The next moment the handle was softly turned, and Enone came in. She walked straight onward, and seated herself in a chair close to the fire. She was always sensitive to the cold; and she spread her thin white hands over the flames, and huddled herself in a large white fleecy shawl which covered her shoulders. The shawl was Mary Lowry's: and Flagge, despite his perturbation, recognized it at once in a quick mechanical way, as though his eyes were endowed with some power of observation apart from the rest of his spirit.

Enone remained with her face towards the fire, and did not see that there was any one besides herself in the room. It was no new or unexpected circumstance that Lady Lowry should keep her waiting, and she sat there with an air of quiet weariness, bending her eyes on the glowing fire. At a slight movement of Flagge's she suddenly turned those wonderful eyes and looked full at him. He stood with his back towards the door, but not so close to it as absolutely to bar the passage of any one wishing to approach it. Enone did not rise, nor speak. She grasped the two arms of the easy chair she sat in, and re-

mained quite still, looking solemnly at him with those wonderful eyes.

Flagge, after a space of time which the clock might have registered as five seconds, but which his pulses counted as a long period of painful apprehension and yearning that made his heart ache, stretched out his hands towards CEnone. He did not stretch them out with the gesture of one who supplicates or calls. He held the palms of them turned outward as if he would have warded off, or shielded himself from something.

"Won't you hear me say a word to you, Nony?" he said, mumbling his words as though he were too nervous to articulate with even as much as his usual distinctness.

"Yes, I will hear," answered CEnone.

Her quietude surprised him; so did the absence of anger in her face. He had seen those great dark eyes flash with scorn and indignation. They did not so flash now. They simply regarded him with a steady and calm gaze; and Flagge could not divest himself of a strange impression that they were looking at him *from a long distance away*. He passed his hands over his forehead. "I wonder if I'm going mad?" he said quietly. "Shouldn't much wonder." Then after an

instant's silence: "Look here, Nony, I want to say that I laid a trap for you;—that's true. But if you move your little finger to show that you choose to leave the room, I ain't a-going to move mine to stop you."

"I will hear you," she answered once more.

"I've been a'most out of my mind with worrying about you, Nony. It's true, as sure as——"

"I believe what you say."

"They wouldn't let me get to see you."

"I did not wish to see you."

"How you say that! Letting your words drop down like icy water on a burning wound! I dunno but there's something mean in a man loving a woman that cares not one straw for him, as much as I love you. But I do love you!" he added quickly. "Guess that must be writ down somewheres in the eternal nature of things, just the same as that fire's hot, or snow cold. 'Tain't left for me to choose, one way or the other. I begin to believe in destiny."

"*Begin* to believe in it? I have always believed in it. But we can resist Fate, if we can't conquer it. Even gods and heroes may be conquered, but they resist to the last, and then Fate has a poor triumph: it can but kill."

He looked at her young face, so wan and haggard, but lighted up now with innocent enthusiasm, and he knew not whether pity or admiration predominated in his heart. She had the soul of a brave woman with the inexperience of a child. He acknowledged with a curious tenderness that C  none believed in all sorts of high-flown and poetic theories, which in another might have excited his ridicule, but which in her seemed to him at once pathetic and adorable.

“Well but, Nony,” said he with a sad smile, “if it’s my fate to love you, I don’t know as I want to resist it. That’s the strange part of love. It burns us, but we don’t want to fly away any more ’n the moth wants to fly away from the flame of the lamp. Between scorching and darkness it chooses to be scorched :—so do I.”

“Have you said what you had to say ?”

“Said what I had to say ! No ; nor a hundredth part of it. Oh, Nony, Nony, if I could say ‘all I have to say,’ it might melt a little corner of that block of pure ice you call your heart. But listen here, I must say this one thing. I want you to forgive me for the words I said——”

She put her hand out with a sudden im-

perious gesture, and her face flushed hotly, and then grew white again. "Hush!" she exclaimed tremulously. "I cannot bear to hear of it!"

"No, Nony, I shall say nothing to hurt or offend you. God knows I'd rather cut off my right hand than hurt you of set purpose! But I was feeling so badly,—I was real mad, Nony. I want you to say just this: 'I forgive you.' Say it, Nony, just out of pity, won't you?"

"Forgive? Yes; I suppose I forgive. If it is forgiving to bear no malice, and feel no anger, I forgive. Now speak no more of that. Let me forget it."

He took an end of the large white shawl she was wrapped in, and put it to his lips. Then he said, "Are you feeling stronger, Nony? You look so white, just like a snow-drop! You ought to have change of air."

She shook her head. "No, no! I don't wish it. I don't need it."

"Wishing and needing are two. Some of these fine folks that call themselves your friends might think of giving you a change. But though they may be the bluest-blooded aristocrats under Heaven, they none of 'em care for you as poor Flagge does. No, they

don't, Nony ;—not one millionth part ! How should they ? ”

“ They have thought of giving me change. It has been offered to me.”

“ And you refused ? ”

“ I refused. I am going away from this house. I am going to have done with it altogether.”

“ Where to ? ” asked Flagge, eagerly and quickly.

“ To the Czernovics. At least for the present.”

Flagge's heart gave a great throb. She was coming to live beneath the same roof with himself ! But he suppressed any too eager manifestation of joy from the fear of startling her. He felt as if she might easily be scared away, like some wild woodland creature. It occurred to him, indeed, that it was possible she was not aware that he lived in the same house with her old friends of Bohemia. “ Do you know where the Czernovics are living now ? ” he asked, cautiously.

“ No ; I have not seen them for a long time. But it will be easy to find them.”

Flagge was struck as Vincent Maude had been by the cool indifference of Cenone's behaviour to the Czernovics, and by her quiet

assumption that they would be ready and willing to welcome her back amongst them at the first hint of her intention to return to them. She seemed to have no more doubt about it than one might feel as to whether a horse would allow himself to be saddled, or a dog come at call.

"Yes," said Flagge, "it will be easy enough to find them. But, Nony, theirs is no home for you."

"Home? No! I have no home."

The instant she had said the words she repented them, for they offered Flagge an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself. He began at once to plead his cause, humbly, with much self-abasement and casting of himself at her feet, as it were; but earnestly, passionately, and persistently. Why should she not have a home? She was worthy of the best on earth; but if she would share his, he would try to make up in devotion what it lacked in material luxury. He would take her away to Italy or Greece, amongst the beautiful things with which Art and Nature had endowed those lands. He would tend her, and wait on her, and be her slave. She should live in an atmosphere of music and poetry. She should enjoy the

exaltation of spirit which riches cannot give, and which was her birthright; and he would minister to her with faithful affection. Nor was all this said with conscious untruthfulness. He warmed his own fancy by his fluent words, and pictured himself basking in the light of the poetic influences which Ænone loved, as if Bourbon whisky and tobacco had never made the chief part of his daily enjoyments.

"No," answered Ænone in a faint, hoarse little voice. "No, no, no. I wish you could believe me!"

He dropped his face in his hands for an instant, and when he looked up again his eyes were wet. "People change their minds, Nony," he said. "You may change yours. I ain't a-going to despair."

"But," said she, earnestly, looking at him with a mixture of solemnity and childlike candour, "it is not 'changing my mind,' as people say. I shall have to change my whole self!"

"You are cruel, Nony—but you don't know how cruel. I s'pose a white-winged angel that had never been incarnated on this earth might look and speak so, and wonder to hear mortals talk of the heartache. But as to 'changing your whole self'—that 'ud be about



‘ the only thing as could cure me, Nony ! So long as you’re you, so long I’ve got to love you, and there’s no two ways about it.”

She rose up slowly from her chair, and held out her hand. He little guessed the effort which it cost her to submit to his touch. “ Good-bye,” she said.

“ Not ‘ good-bye,’ Nony ! Not ‘ good-bye ! ’ ”

“ Yes, good-bye. I am going away. I don’t think we shall meet. I hope not. It would do you no good. If you mean what you say—well, no ; I do not intend to doubt you ! I believe you do mean it. But that is all the more reason why we should keep apart.”

“ Would *you* run away from any one whose face was the light of your life ? ”

She coloured with a painful flush. “ Yes ; if it would do that some one good. But women are different. They can sit still and suffer, and that hurts nobody but themselves. Men are not resigned. They keep striving. Good-bye. And—and—if you can be true, and not deceive people, and rise above things that are false, you will be happier, and I shall be comforted to know that all your thoughts of me will not be painful. They may be sad,

but you will not be ashamed of them. If I were going to live a long time perhaps I should not venture to speak to you so. But as it is, you will forgive me, won't you? Now, good-bye!"

He stood still as if he had been stricken into stone. Her words "if I were going to live a long time" seemed to affect him like a physical chill. Before he could recover himself, Ænone had glided past him and was gone. He was startled by the rustle of a dress and a voice close in his ear. "Upon my word, Dr. Flagge, I don't understand what you mean by keeping me waiting in this fashion whilst you stand there as if you were moonstruck! What have you been about? Where's Miss Balasso?"

It was Lady Lowry. Flagge turned round with a start. He had totally forgotten her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

LADY LOWRY was very indignant, and a little puzzled. Flagge cared no jot for her indignation, and might at another moment have been amused by her perplexity. But it did not suit him to quarrel with her; so he recovered his usual manner,—or something so nearly like it as sufficed to prevent Sarah from discovering his perturbation.

“Where is Miss Balasso?” repeated my lady, staring round the boudoir as if she expected to descry CEnone under a table, or behind a sofa cushion.

“She’s gone upstairs again. It’s best not to worry her any more just now.”

“But did you mesmerize her?”

“Oh yes,” answered Flagge. Almost as the words passed his lips, however, he remembered CEnone’s ingenuous pleadings that he should try not to deceive people, and to rise above things that were false, and he felt an

odd and unaccustomed sense of shame. Not that he intended for one instant to tell the truth to Lady Lowry ; but he hoped that Enone might not hear of the lie.

“ Well ? What did the spirits say ? ”

“ They said,—their answers were nebulous. There was a want of distinctness, arising from a species of haze in the mental atmosphere of the medium, lady.”

“ And what makes her so hazy ? I really think she might exert herself to keep her mind clear instead of being ‘ hazy ’ after all I’ve done for her ! ”

“ The physical conditions of the medium are beyond her control. And they act and react on the spiritual elements, so as to cause a condition resembling that of the moon a-shining through mists which prevent the rays having their full expansion and illumination. There are difficulties to the carnal mind in conceiving these impalpable influences ; but to you, lady, who have considerable of a transcendental nature, they will reveal themselves as the conditions of a higher intellectual sphere than ours, and you will understand ’em.”

But Sarah was not to be coaxed into good humour by even such flatteries as attributing

to her a peculiar comprehension of "higher intellectual spheres."

"I've no doubt I should understand what they said well enough if you'd only tell me what it was," she returned curtly. "You can't expect any one to understand what they've never heard a word of, can you, Dr. Flagge?"

Perhaps Dr. Flagge, whose mind was in constant communion with beings not amenable to the laws of common sense as accepted among mortals, *could* expect something of the sort; for he made no reply, but smiled vaguely and tossed his self-locks back from his forehead with an air of abstraction.

"I'll trouble you to let me know at once—at once, Dr. Flagge—what Sir Rupert Lowry has been saying, or if he has been saying anything at all, and in short what the spirits advise us to do next. If they've no suggestion to offer we must decide for ourselves, and it'll be no good their blaming us afterwards, you know!"

Upon this, Dr. Flagge roused himself to speak somewhat more to the purpose. It was difficult, indeed, for him to give her ladyship any categorical instructions, whether purporting to come from the spirits or not. But

he spoke to the following effect: that so far as they had gone, the investigations carried on by Sir Cosmo Lowry, respecting his father's will, were eminently soothing and satisfactory to the spirit of the departed: that he thoroughly approved of them, and desired that further inquiries might be made: that he could not for the present indicate the whereabouts of the missing will owing to sundry "conditions" of the spiritual sphere which he then inhabited; but his dear Cosmo and Sarah might be very sure that whatever difficulties they encountered in prosecuting their inquiries were merely intended to try their faith.

"Well," said my lady after a little reflection, "that isn't so vague;—not so very vague. I wish he could have told us where the will is, though, and what is in it. For as to trying our faith,—Sir Cosmo has paid handsomely for the information you got him, and I don't see how you can prove your faith better than by paying! However, Sir Rupert means us to go on: and that's the main thing."

How to "go on," however, was not easy to be decided on. Lady Lowry, in speaking afterwards to her husband on the subject,

suggested that he should see Mr. Flint, and communicate to him simply the fact that Sir Rupert had made a will in the July before his death. That would be at least a beginning.

“See Mr. Flint? That’s easily said, Sally,” cried Sir Cosmo. “Do you suppose I’m going to undertake the journey to Elcaster in this weather, and be poisoned by bad wine at the beastly hotel there?”

But Lady Lowry hastened to inform her husband that Mr. Flint was expected in London:—nay, probably was in town already; and that nothing would be easier than to appoint a meeting with him. Sir Cosmo began to swear under his breath, and to suggest obstacles and difficulties, until Sarah exclaimed, “Why, I can’t make out why you’re so unwilling. I suppose you ain’t afraid to speak your mind to Mr. Flint?” And the fact being that Sir Cosmo was more or less afraid to speak his mind to Mr. Flint, he repudiated the suggestion with a fresh access of petulant ill-humour.

But Sarah, of course, prevailed. She prevailed not only because her husband had taken the habit of yielding to her, but because in this instance her importunity was backed up by his

own greed, and his secret belief that some discovery valuable to himself would surely be brought to light, if he troubled himself to seek it. Accordingly he wrote a note requesting Mr. Flint to do him the favour to call on him on a certain day, at a certain hour, and he sent the note to the care of Mrs. Hautecombe at the address written on Mrs. Flint's card.

It chanced that when the baronet's note was delivered to Mr. Flint in Mrs. Hautecombe's drawing-room, there were several afternoon visitors in it. There was Miss Lowry and Mr. Percival Wigmore, and another gentleman of our acquaintance who had recently been revisiting the glimpses of polite society, and who had recognized an old connection of his family in the widow of Colonel Hautecombe. This gentleman was Cassius Demayne. His clothes were now perfectly fashionable, so that it was impossible to distinguish him from the Wigmores of the world; particularly since whatever zest or interest the back slums of Europe might have imparted to his conversation was suppressed in Mrs. Hautecombe's drawing-room, and he said the sort of things which the Wigmores of the world say, with an air of wooden stolidity which many a Wigmore might have striven in vain to achieve.



Not that our special Wigmore "went in" for that sort of thing. Nature, to be sure, had saved him the trouble of assuming vacuousness of mind. But his temperament was cheerful and buoyant, and utterly alien to the languid superciliousness of modern manners. And as to affecting boredom lest society should despise him for being too easily amused, so vulgar a pretension never entered into the head of our Percival. Snobbery, like genius, is confined to no social sphere, but, as Dogberry says of reading and writing, comes by nature; and Percy was quite free from it. Indeed, his own freedom from pretension made him fail to appreciate the talents and industry of those who schooled themselves into a state of outward impassibility, which, if genuine, would have argued the absence not only of sentiments but of sensations. And he was wont to say of Cassius Demayne, for example, that he was an uncommonly good fellow, only "rather stoopid, don't you know."

Amidst this company Mr. Flint, newly arrived from Elcaster, was sitting when Sir Cosmo's note was brought to him. He read it in silence, and then carried it to his wife and put it into her hand. Mrs. Flint was conversing in an undertone with Miss Lowry.

"I think, my dear," she was saying, "that I never saw such a singular face. Such eyes, and such a bloodless-looking skin, as if it was made of parchment, and such a strange, solemn manner for a young girl! The poor thing looks frightfully ill. If she were a child of mine I should send her to Madeira. Well, to be sure there's no accounting for tastes—especially men's tastes! But it does seem astonishing to me that a fine soldierly-looking Englishman like Major Maude should be attracted by that poor skinny little foreign creature. Eh? Do you want me, Samuel? Oh, a note from Sir Cosmo! This will be about your business now, Miss Lowry."

"Is it my brother who writes to you?" asked Mary of Mr. Flint.

"Yes; Sir Cosmo wishes me to appoint a morning for calling on him. No doubt it is to settle the terms of the tenancy of Lowry Place."

"Cosmo has said nothing to me on the subject recently."

"Has he not? Still, I know no other business on which he can want to see me. It must be about that, I suppose."

"I suppose it must."

"And it is much better that I should treat

for you than that you should discuss the terms yourself. I think Sir Cosmo is right in not talking to you on the subject."

"I suppose so. Yes, I dare say he is."

"I say, Miss Lowry, is it really true that you're goin' to run away and bury yourself in the country?" cried Wigmore suddenly.

He was apt to utter the thought that came uppermost, regardless of its want of connection with the preceding subject of discourse, which gave his conversation the piquancy of unexpectedness at least, if it lacked that of wit.

"Not quite to bury myself, I hope," returned Mary with a little smile.

"But you really are goin' into the country? At this time of year! Why, what on earth shall you do with yourself? You don't go in for huntin'!"

"I shall have a card sent me every week with the various appointments for the foxhounds, and I can read that, you know. It will be some comfort."

"Miss Lowry of Lowry will be at no loss for society and amusement if she will only deign to be sociable, and accept them," observed Mrs. Flint.

"Won't she? Jove! *I* should. I never know what to do with myself in the country."

"I dare say," replied Mrs. Flint drily.

"Unless it's at a big house full of people, don't you know? Then it's pretty nearly as good fun as bein' in town. In point of fact, you'd scarcely know you weren't in town if you didn't look out of the window. But a quiet family party in the country—why, when I go down to Wigmore's place—I don't often, but sometimes when I want—ahem! My wife says it's better to keep up family connections, don't you know?—and so we do sometimes run down for two or three days at a time. And I give you my word of honour it's enough to kill a fellow. Wigmore's billiard-table is the beastliest thing you ever saw. And he's got a chamber-organ in the library, and Lady Wigmore plays on it—psalm tunes and things of that sort; she's regularly Evangelical, and I'll declare to you you hear this thing begin mooin' like a melancholy mad cow before eight o'clock on a Sunday mornin'! and some of the notes have a rumblin' kind of sound that regularly makes you quiver in your bed like bein' on board a screw steamer. Oh no, I can't stand the country."

"We will trust that Miss Lowry's rural experiences are of a less appalling nature," said Demayne. He had been presented to

Mary by Mrs. Hautecombe, and had carefully abstained from mentioning the only circumstance which could have been likely to make her cordial and interested in him, instead of merely courteous and tolerant,—the circumstance, namely, of his friendship with the Peppiats. He knew, of course, that Miss Lowry had some family connection with the Captain and his wife, and that she sometimes went to see them. But he piqued himself on his knowledge of the world, and was not going to commit the blunder of alluding to lodging-house keepers in Bloomsbury as the friends of so well-born and high-bred a lady as Miss Lowry of Lowry. You see, this knowledge of the world, of which some folks are so proud, and which they deem so useful, can but be after all the knowledge of that which our own little mental mirror will reflect for us. This world that we boast of knowing is mainly a Berkleian kind of universe which depends on our consciousness for its very existence!

“My rural experiences,” said Mary, “are the experiences of all my life until last September, for I was never in London before that time.”

“La! Never in London? Oh yes; by-

the-by, I think Lady Lowry did mention it," said Percival. "Ah, well, you see Lowry Place was your home,, and all that kind of thing. That's different, of course. Oh I remember it used to be jolly enough at our place in my father's time before Wigmore had it. We boys used to have great fun. I recollect one day when we were home from Harrow. Wigmore was lungin' at me with a pitchfork they'd left beside a haycart in the paddock, and, by Jove ! he ran one of the prongs clean through the fleshy part of my leg ! You can see the mark to this day. Oh yes ; I don't mean to say you can't enjoy yourself in the country, you know. Only you ought to have a decent billiard-table, and no organ, if your wife happens to be Evangelical."

"No wife, perhaps, might be a better recipe for jollity," said Demayne.

"What a very ungallant speech !" exclaimed Mrs. Flint. She was not inclined to hear marriage sneered at—especially not in Mary Lowry's presence, for she was impatient to see her friend reigning triumphantly over one of the finest establishments in the county. She certainly sincerely desired Mary's happiness, but at the same time her eagerness that Mary should make a splendid marriage was

spurred on by a wish that Lady Lowry should be mortified and put down to a degree of which she was herself quite unconscious. "A country house specially requires a mistress to make it pleasant."

"You have tried your own recipe, Mr. Demayne," said Mrs. Hautecombe, a gentle old lady, with soft dark eyes and an old-fashioned muslin cap tied under her chin.

"And it hasn't produced the jollity, you mean? Well, I own that's a fair hit. But I dare say I'm jollier than I look. A man who has knocked about the world as I have don't acquire a soft and genial expression of countenance. If you play hand fives long, your palm will get to be like leather. I've been playing hand fives with the world until I'm a perfect moral rhinoceros."

"Thick-skinned, eh?" said Percy, with an air of being rather pleased with himself for seizing so rapidly on the meaning of Demayne's metaphor. "Ah, well, bein' thick-skinned's all very well in some things, but at times it's a noosance. Now, there's a fellow at my club—Junior Georgic, an uncommonly stoopid club, I think—a man with a mania for political economy, who will talk statistics. Well, I give you my word that man's so thick-skinned

it's impossible to make him understand that he's borin' you. Only the other day he button-holed me in the smokin' room—he was on customs, and tariffs, and things of that sort, don't you know—and began borin' about jute. Don't even know what it is. And I asked one or two fellers, and they didn't know. One of the Dabley boys said it was something connected with jetsam, don't you know—but that was only his fun. However, it shows that a man may be too thick-skinned, don't it ? ”

“Percy, you are acquainted with Major Maude, are you not? Mrs. Flint has been telling me that she met him at Lady Lowry's. Ask him to come and see me. Your uncle and I were very fond of him in old times,” said Mrs. Hautecombe. “I thought he was in India.”

“Oh, la bless you, no ! He's in Piccadilly. Oh yes. Maude's a very nice feller. You know him, don't you, Demayne? He didn't hit it off with Flagge altogether, did he, Miss Lowry? Maude's a capital feller, only he takes things a little too seriously sometimes. Now, with sayuneses that won't do.”

“With what, Percy ? ” asked his aunt.

“Sayuneses. Spirits, don't you know? It's no good borin' on about whether it's all true



or not. It's a sort of thing that ought to be taken lightly,—just touch and go. Then it's amusin'. But if you insist on believin' or disbelievin', and probin' things to the bottom, it becomes a noosance, don't you know."

Upon this there arose an animated discussion on the subject of spiritism. Mrs. Flint thought it distinctly irreligious, and considered that "mediums" and "clairvoyants" and persons of that kind ought to be solemnly condemned by the Bench of Bishops. Mrs. Hautecombe wondered whether there was anything in it, and hoped it was not wrong to wish there might be found some means of communicating with the departed. Mr. Flint observed that by the very nature of the case there was hardly any conceivable evidence which would convince a jury of sane men that spirits unenclosed in mortal bodies were communicating with mankind. Mr. Demayne shrugged his shoulders with his self-repressed air of having found out all about everything, but, not choosing to destroy other people's illusions, he remarked that the thing was as old as the hills, and had been done in India from time immemorial. Miss Lowry alone was silent, and looked grave. "Why, my dear," said Mrs. Hautecombe, turning to

her, "I am told that your sister-in-law, Lady Lowry, is quite a leading personage among spiritists; and that she has converted her husband to believe in it all. You must see and hear a great deal of it."

But Mary was averse from speaking on the subject, and took her leave very shortly. Before she went away Mr. Flint told her that he would send a note to Sir Cosmo in the course of the afternoon, appointing a day and hour to see him.

Percy Wigmore and Demayne walked a short distance together as they left Mrs. Hautecombe's house. "Wonderfully handsome woman, Miss Lowry," said Demayne.

"Oh yes; she's awfully good-looking. So's her sister-in-law."

"Ah! But Miss Lowry has 'that thoroughbred air that I dote upon,' as Byron said."

"Did he? Oh, well, Byron was a poet, you know. I don't care about women bein' so awfully thoroughbred and all that. I like Lady Lowry. She never gets on the high ropes, don't you know. And she has a skin that makes these London women look ghastly almost."

"Person of no family, isn't she?"

"Oh, well, I don't care a straw about her

family. And I don't think the world does either. That sort of thing's going out a good deal. Look at the dinners you get given you by fellers that never had a grandfather! Reg'lar low fellows in some respects, but everybody eats 'em;—I mean their dinners. Oh, family's all very well, but you can't live on your family. At least I believe some fellers do; but I know *I* can't. Wigmore's wife would see me—further first!"

## CHAPTER XV.

THE meeting between Sir Cosmo Lowry and Mr. Flint took place two days after the afternoon chronicled in the last chapter. Mr. Flint prepared himself for some haggling, for several disagreeable speeches, and for a general unpleasantness of manner on the baronet's part. But for the communication which the latter really did make to him he was totally unprepared; and it robbed him for the moment of his self-possession. However, the loss of his self-possession was only mental. It did not extend to his outward manner, which continued to be grave and steady as usual. And during the pause which ensued after Sir Cosmo had finished saying what he had to say, Mr. Flint recovered his presence of mind. He had not, indeed, collected his thoughts sufficiently to have formed a plan of action, but he was able to resolve that he

would not be hurried or surprised into any course without taking due time for reflection.

"You had no idea, I suppose, that my father had made a will so recently," said Sir Cosmo, watching him furtively.

"Of course not! How was it possible that I should have had such an idea? Nor do I think the circumstance one of very great importance—supposing it to be true."

"It's quite true, and it strikes me as being of considerable importance," returned Sir Cosmo with a sniff.

"I think not, for this reason: if your father had intended that will to be acted upon, he would certainly have informed me."

"You would have said yesterday that if my father had made a will so lately as last July he would certainly have informed you. Yet you see he made the will and told you nothing about it!"

"The two cases are not quite analogous, Sir Cosmo. But if your father did make a will in July, he certainly destroyed it before his death."

"I'm not at all certain about it."

"Why, what do you suppose he did with it if he did not destroy it? And why should he not have mentioned it to me? I saw him

—he was in my office three days before he died.”

“He did write a letter to you on the last evening of his life. He evidently wished to make some communication to you. I have a copy of that letter, you know, Mr. Flint. It strikes me that that letter adds enormous weight to Mr. Quickit’s statement.”

“Of course I remember furnishing you with a copy of that letter. Well, Sir Cosmo, what is it that you expect, or propose to do?”

“If my father made a will subsequent to the one which was proved, and if that later will is extant, it ought to be acted on.”

“Oh, certainly—*if!*”

“Perhaps the first thing to be done is that you should satisfy yourself that such a will really was made and witnessed. I will give you Mr. Quickit’s address, if you like.”

“What does Miss Lowry think of the tardy revelation of this Mr.—of this witness?”

“Mary knows nothing about it; but I don’t doubt she would desire to act honourably, and to carry out Sir Rupert’s wishes.”

“Oh, so then you conceive this later will to have been more favourable to *your* interests!” said Mr. Flint quickly.

“I say I am quite sure that my sister

would wish to act honourably in the matter, Mr. Flint."

"Act honourably! The phrase sounds almost offensive to my ears, Sir Cosmo, as implying the possibility of Miss Lowry's acting otherwise than honourably! Not that such an idea would be likely to cross *your* mind, of all men's in the world."

"Of course my sister will have to be told if we set inquiries afoot; and if—if we make a search for the will, you know."

"Where do you think of making a search for the will, Sir Cosmo?"

"In Lowry Place. Naturally, that is the place to look for it in!"

"Yes; as you say, of course Miss Lowry will have to be told. Indeed, she must be told in any case. But—excuse me for saying so—I think you and Lady Lowry are setting off on a wild-goose chase, and preparing a disappointment for yourselves."

"That is my business, Mr. Flint."

"As to making a search—you are aware that Sir Rupert's papers were carefully and minutely inspected after his decease?"

It rose to Sir Cosmo's lips to say, "*I* did not inspect them." But he refrained, and merely answered, "Of course there was no

search for a will, you know, because my father's last will and testament was supposed to be safe in the strong box at your office! Consequently there was no need for the sort of search which I intend to have made."

"If Miss Lowry permits it."


"Mary will scarcely refuse, for her own sake. It would have a very odd appearance if she showed any reluctance, you know."

If Mr. Flint had had a more intimate acquaintance with Sarah, Lady Lowry, he would have recognized her influence in the tone, nay, in the very phrase of this speech. He walked away from Sir Cosmo's house in anything but a pleasant or comfortable frame of mind. He tried to recall the wording of that letter which his old friend had written to him on the night preceding his death. But—not having studied it with the same attention as Lady Lowry had bestowed on it—he did not succeed very well. He only retained a general impression that Sir Rupert wished to communicate to him some arrangement or disposition which was likely to incur his (Mr. Flint's) disapproval. It might have been about the terms of sundry leases then to be renewed, and as to which the old baronet and his lawyer had not been quite agreed. It might



have been about fifty matters of more or less importance, which came crowding into Mr. Flint's mind as he walked along Piccadilly. But as to a new will—if Sir Rupert had wished to make a new will, or to reveal the fact of his having made a new one, why had he not plainly said so? The whole proceeding was unlike all that Mr. Flint knew of Sir Rupert's fearless, dogged, overbearing character. But then Mr. Flint did not know every secret recess of the old man's close-shut heart. And Mr. Flint was obliged to confess to himself that the course of his experience, and the results of his most sagacious observation, tended to the conclusion that in the matter of testamentary dispositions there was no reasoning *à priori*. "In fact," said Mr. Flint to himself, "I'm rapidly arriving at the conviction that in the two most important actions of life, choosing a wife and making a will, men are incapable of ratiocination, and are given over to the promptings of some familiar spirit, good or bad—generally bad!"

He went to Howard Buildings, and had an interview with Mr. Quickit. And as the first result of that interview he asked to see Dr. Flagge, who, however, the slatternly servant maid declared, was not at home. Mr. Flint



felt rather doubtful of the statement from the manner in which it was made. However, he had no remedy, and was walking along the narrow entrance passage towards the street door, when some one ran quickly downstairs and overtook him. It was a tall, bearded man, whose face Mr. Flint could not well see by the dim light which filtered through the dirty glass above the hall door, but whose figure and height made him jump to a sudden conclusion as to his identity.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Flint, making way for the stranger in the narrow passage, "but could you inform me whether Dr. Flagge is within?"

"No; I'm sorry to say I can't," returned the other. "I have been seeing some people who live in another part of the house." Then, after an instant's hesitation, he added, "I don't think I'm mistaken; you are Mr. Flint, of Elcaster?"

"Of course I am Mr. Flint of Elcaster, and of course you are Mr.—I should say Major—Maude! I knew you instinctively." The two men shook hands, and left the house together.

As they walked up Howard Buildings towards the Strand Mr. Flint, whose mind was

entirely preoccupied by one subject, asked Maude if he happened to know anything of the person who called himself Dr. Flagge. He received in reply as accurate an account of that celebrated medium as Maude was able to give him. It did not take long to rehearse. Mr. Flint listened attentively, with a grave and anxious face.

"The man's an unscrupulous impostor, then," said he, when Maude had finished. "That's the summing-up, I take it."

"I take it so, too."

"How on earth did he get into the Lowrys' house?"

"Some friends of Lady Lowry brought him there. This spirit medium business is very fashionable."

"A nice importation they've sent us from the other side of the Atlantic!"

"Oh, well, as to that," returned Maude, "I don't think we can complain. We have home-bred 'mediums,' too, by the score. And to say truth, the chief difference I find between the native article and the Transatlantic original is, that the latter do their tricks much the best. Our people—those whom I have seen, at least—are far clumsier."

"I'm glad to find that you don't believe in this nonsense, at all events."

“Not in Dr. Flagge, certainly.”

“Nor in any performer of the same kind, I hope? I have a horror of the whole thing—clairvoyance, mesmerism, and all the rest of it! It’s all humbug.”

“I don’t know that I am prepared to make so sweeping a profession of unbelief. For instance, there is a young lady whom I have just now been seeing, who lives at present with a family in Quickit’s house, and I believe her to be what is called a clairvoyante when under the influence of mesmerism.”

“Humph! I don’t know the young lady, of course. But I may be allowed to say without offence that young people sometimes have a curious gratification in deceiving; the sense of power pleases them, I suppose.”

“Miss Balasso does not consciously deceive. She may be played on by these mediums, she may be an instrument in their hands, but never an accomplice.”

The two men parted when they reached Charing Cross, and Mr. Flint walked back to Brompton in so deep a reverie as to risk being run over once or twice, and to draw down on his unconscious head the ready and fluent anathemas of divers cabmen and omnibus-drivers in the course of his progress to Mrs. Hautecombe’s house.

He was disquieted for more reasons than one. His wife had not failed to give him her impression of Sir Cosmo Lowry's household, and her impression was not an agreeable one. She had also called his attention to Mary's altered looks, and the air of languor which had come over her, and which was very different from the serene repose, the quiet cheerfulness of her former manner. "But yet," Mr. Flint had said to his wife, "Miss Lowry's life at home with the old man was not a very gay or pleasant one."

"Not gay, perhaps. But at least she had no Lady Lowry to shock her taste and hurt her feelings every hour of the day."

"Nor a thoroughly heartless, selfish brother to disappoint her hopes and repulse her affection, Bertha."

"As to that, Sir Cosmo wouldn't be half so bad if it were not for that dreadful woman. You have no idea what a creature she is. And to think of her being a Lowry! I'm sure it's preying on Miss Lowry's mind."

Mr. Flint, after he had been a day or two in London, began to have some secret and half-formed misgivings that there might be another cause for the change which he could not help observing in Mary Lowry. But he did not

! speak of this misgiving to any one. His wife had told him of Major Maude's singular infatuation for the little foreign girl, and he had this day been told by Major Maude himself that he had just been to see the little foreign girl whose name was fixed in Mr. Flint's tenacious memory. Was it possible that Mary Lowry was fretting and pining from unrequited love? Mary Lowry! The thing seemed incredible. But Mr. Flint, as he walked to Brompton, reflected that several things which he would have deemed incredible a short time ago had actually happened, or were actually happening. Sir Rupert Lowry had made a will without his (Mr. Flint's) knowledge—Quickit's testimony had convinced the old lawyer on that point—and Miss Lowry of Lowry, the beautiful, high-born, noble-hearted Mary Lowry, might actually live to see herself neglected for a little nondescript, white-faced, foreign music teacher. "Yes; it is so," said Mr. Flint to himself as he stood on Mrs. Hautecombe's doorstep waiting for admission. "I begin to believe in sober earnest that in making a will and choosing a wife the majority of mankind are given over to the promptings of the devil!"

After luncheon and two glasses of certain

special sherry which the late Colonel Hautecombe had left in his cellars, Mr. Flint admitted that there were exceptions to his diabolical theory. But he was still sorely disquieted by the anticipation of the effect which the revelation he was bound to make would have on Mary Lowry. She would be told that her father had made a will, the making of which will he had kept secret from his friends and family; that the document was supposed to be still in existence in some unknown hiding-place; and that she was required to submit to a thorough search being made in her own house for an instrument which might altogether change her fortunes and position.

“Though, indeed, as to that, I don’t believe—I cannot believe—that Sir Rupert died knowing that there existed a will subsequent to the one in my office, and made no sign!” said Mr. Flint to himself, changing from one view of the case to another, with a seesaw of indecision very unusual in his well-balanced mind. “He made the other will in London in a fit of temper—I remember he threatened something of the sort once—and then put it in the fire as soon as he got home. July! That was six weeks before he died. No; he

never would have kept it secret all that time, in all the talks we had together. The thing's impossible. Nevertheless, Miss Lowry must be told, and there's no better way of telling her than for me to write her a note. It will be less trying to both of us than talking of it.—Ah ! ”

And with a sigh and a rueful shake of the head, Mr. Flint sat down to write to Mary Lowry.



## CHAPTER XVI.

ENONE had made a great resolve. In Lady Lowry's house she saw Vincent Maude frequently, almost daily, and the moments which she passed in the same room with him were the only ones in all her life which she longed for before they came; although they too often left her sadder and more sore-hearted than ever, when they had passed. Nevertheless she was resolved to give up those bitter-sweet moments, and voluntarily to withdraw herself from the sphere which Maude frequented. She would plunge down again into the depths of a world which he only touched casually, and at its surface; and the waters would close over her, and her place would know her no more.

The sense of her own loneliness oppressed her hourly. And yet she was impelled to hide herself in still deeper loneliness. O for the touch of a loving hand!—a hand she could cling to and caress, and which should come

empty of all gifts save love ! The affectionate kindness of friends, and benefactors, and those who bestowed boons—what were these to her young ardent nature hungry for love,—yearning to be nearest and dearest to some human heart ? There rose up in her thoughts the image of Flagge. But it only made her tremble and shudder, even whilst she pitied him.

All her highly-wrought resolves, all her romantic visions of self-sacrifice, had been, she felt, a mere mirage of the mind, a delusion of her fancy. She could, she thought, even now do some heroic deed for one she loved ; but, alas ! no heroic deed was demanded of her. She had but to sit apart, and let the happy folks who loved each other pass by in the sunshine. Yes ; one thing she could do : she could withdraw far enough from them to keep her shadow from darkening their bright path. Poor slender little shadow !

Often latterly her thoughts had turned towards her absent father. She had but a dim recollection of him, but she seemed to remember beautiful dark eyes—Greek eyes—and a soft voice speaking to her mother in a language which CEnone did not understand. If her father would but come to her ! Or, better still, if she might but go to him ! He

must lead a strange adventurous wandering life out in those Eastern lands. Cenone knew that he was a merchant, and travelled hither and thither into many wild countries. She would not be afraid of hardships; she would not be a burthen on him. If need were she could lie down uncomplainingly to die in some desert place, with the sand beneath her and the sky above her, and her tired head resting on a heart that loved her, and that she had the right to love and trust to.

She made up her mind that she would try to write to her father. The Czernovics would be able to give her the latest address they had from him, and Cenone would send a letter thither. It might be like shooting an arrow into the air, but she would try. The first thing to be done, however, was to get at the Czernovics. She put a letter in the post for Papa Czernovic, directed to St. Cecilia's Hall. The letter simply set forth her desire to return to them for a time, and stated that next day she and her trunk would be ready at three o'clock, if some of them would come to fetch her. Accordingly she quietly prepared and packed her clothes,—no long or laborious task,—and, at the time fixed, carried her hat and gloves down into the hall, and taking up

her station in the dining-room, waited in the assured expectation that some of the Czernovic family would appear in answer to her summons. Nor was her expectation disappointed.

A few minutes after three she heard a ring at the door bell. She had posted herself in the dining-room on purpose to be able to hear the arrival of her foreign friends, and to go to their assistance in case any difficulty should arise between them and Lady Lowry's servants. A murmur of voices was heard in the hall, and Eneone gliding quickly and quietly out of the dining-room, found Papa Czernovic talking fluently and politely to a footman, who stared at him in genuine surprise, whilst Lobley looked on, majestic and supercilious, from the background.

"Ach, mein kind, dere you are!" cried Papa Czernovic. "Well, ve are in time, eh? It is pùnt dree. How of your dronk, mein kind?"

"My trunk is ready, Papa."

"Ah, dat is goot. Will dis gentleman now carry it to de keb? Ve hev a keb here."

The "gentleman" in plush breeches, at whom old Czernovic looked insinuatingly with his head on one side, stared helplessly back again, and then glanced appealingly at Lobley

for advice. That grand creature stepped forward. "May I ask, Miss Balasser," he said, "what it is that this person wants?"

Czernovic made him a profound bow. "Ah, goot day, goot day," he said, with infinite suavity. "Vill dis young mensch bring de dronk to de keb, sir?"

"I want my box carried downstairs," said Enone curtly. "I-am going away."

"Going away, Miss Balasser! Does—excuse me, but does my lady know?"

"No. It is no matter. I am free to go as I choose. Can James carry the box for me?"

"Ah, see here, mein kind, no need to drouble de young mensch. I have Sacha here wiz me. He carries your dronk in one hand and you in de oder. Come here, Sacha. Come here herein, mein sohn!" And Papa Czernovic opened the hall door and revealed the tall figure of Alexander Czernovic, familiarly called Sacha, standing on the steps keeping watch and ward over a red-faced cabman, who, having descended from the box of his vehicle, was leaning against the area railings and observing Sacha with true insular mistrust and disdain. Sacha's appearance, it must be owned, was outlandish. He wore a long green coat of his father's manufacture, coming down to his

heels, a red woollen scarf round his throat, and on his head a round black cloth cap like a skull-cap, edged with grey astrakan fur, from beneath which his long fox-coloured hair and beard flowed down in wavy disorder. Sacha was smoking a large meerschaum pipe, and looking straight before him with his keen light blue eyes.

On hearing his father's summons, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the railings, put the pipe in his pocket, and walked into the hall, removing his black cap in token of salutation to Enone, but neither looking at nor speaking to any one else. He kept his eyes fixed, indeed, on his father, who said a few words to him in Russian very rapidly.

"Vere is your room, Nona? Ah, op high? Ja so!" Then he said something more in Russian to Sacha, who forthwith proceeded across the hall towards the staircase.

The footman, and an inquisitive housemaid who had joined the group, and Lobley, had all been standing with an air of bewilderment, looking on at the proceedings of Papa Czernovic. But at this crisis Lobley roused himself to interfere with authority. He placed himself in front of Sacha, and said with as much dignity as he could manage to assume, "Excuse

me, young man, but I cannot allow of your walking about the 'ouse in this free and easy fashion. I must speak to my lady. If Miss Balasser's box is to be brought down, it will be brought down by the proper 'ands. You had better step outside again, and wait for further orders, if you please."

Sacha looked down on the top of Lobley's head with imperturbable nonchalance.

"Stand steady, Sacha, my son," said the old man, still speaking in Russian. And Sacha stood like a rock.

Enone turned to the butler. "What do you mean by this?" she said haughtily. "Do you imagine that any one here has the right to detain me for an instant?"

"No, no!" cried Papa Czernovic emphatically, but still with a smile of perfect good humour on his face. "Ah, no! no! Not detain! Ah, Gott, dese gentlemen would not dink——! It is a choke, ha!" And he included the three servants in a circular bow of immense suavity. At this moment the door of the boudoir was flung wide open, and there appeared on the threshold of it my Lady Lowry herself, gazing in unspeakable surprise and indignation on the group in the hall.

Enone remained still in her place. She

had seated herself wearily on a large carved settee in the hall, and, with the exception of the few words she had spoken to the butler, seemed to be looking on as at a scene in which her part was that of a mere spectator. The Czernovics would do and say any hard or disagreeable thing that needed to be done and said on her behalf. She had at once resumed her old habit of letting them do her liege service, as a matter of course. But Lobley went up to his mistress, and with bated breath explained to her the state of the case so far as he was able.

“Going away!” reiterated my lady, nearly breathless with dignity and surprise.

“I told you I was going, Lady Lowry.”

“Told me you were going! You mentioned something about it, and I said I would speak to the Honourable Mrs. Wigmore, and endeavour to get you pupils, and so forth;—but anything so sudden, and so sly as this, I never imagined. Never! And where are you going, pray? I never heard of such behaviour.”

Papa Czernovic, who had been observing my lady with an air of good-humoured shrewdness, now went up to her, and bowed several times in a manner only comparable to that of a buffo singer at the Italian Opera. “She



go wiz me, honourable lady. 'Ow do you do?"

"Go away! How dare you? Who is this person, Lobley? Why are such persons let into my house?"

"Miss Balasser's papa, my lady," began Lobley in a low voice, when Czernovic interrupted him. "Goot, goot! Dat is good choke! No, I am not Mees Balassopoulo's papa! I am Herr Fedor Czernovic, of de Saint Cecilia Hall. You have hear of de Muscovite Minstrel? Well, it is me and my wife and my sons and my daughters, ja!"

"The—a—individual's son was going upstairs to fetch down Miss Balasser's box, my lady," resumed Lobley, "but I thought it my dooty to inform your ladyship before I allowed—why, where is he?"

Sacha, on a sign from his father, had marched straight upstairs to the top of the house, as soon as the general attention was diverted from him by Lady Lowry's appearance. And he was now seen coming down again cool, clear-eyed, and stolid as ever, bearing Ænone's little trunk on his shoulder.

"Oh, you—you sly minx!" exclaimed my lady, provoked into a touch of nature, which if it did not make her kin with the whole

world, at least roused a responsive chord in the breast of her housemaid. "The idea of your running off in this way! The idea of your not saying one word about it! It isn't respectable, positively; not really respectable!"

The housemaid tossed her head corroboratively. She had been obliged to make Miss Balasso's bed, to her great disgust. And now she hoped my lady saw what came of harbouring such creatures. And yet if Miss Balasso had but dined in the servants' hall instead of at the master's table, Polly's sympathies would have been all on her side. Polly epitomized a good deal of social rancour in that shake of the head.

"It is useless to speak to me so. Your anger is trivial, and you express it coarsely. I owe you nothing, not even a farewell. I am tired of this house;—wearied to death. And I go." CEnone spoke with unfeigned contempt. She was not irritated. Lady Lowry could not touch any sensitive point in her singular nature. Her genuine disdain for my lady impressed even Polly; and Lobley secretly admired her for it very much. What was odd was that Lady Lowry's heat of anger seemed cooled by CEnone's contemptu-

ous calm. Sarah reflected—half unconsciously, perhaps—that a girl in Miss Balasso's position would never be so independent if she had not some secret source of power. "She knows that I have depended on her a good deal to hear what Sir Rupert had to say," thought my lady. The thought did not mitigate her indignation against Enone, but it softened the expression of it, especially since Lobley and the other servants were all eyes and ears, and my lady felt that it would never do to cut a bad figure in the eyes of *that* audience.

"Well, you always were a peculiar girl," said she. "And I can't treat you as I should treat other people. But for your sake, you—you inexperienced child, I insist on knowing who these persons are that you are going away with."

"You know them very well. They are the Czernovics—the Russian people I have lived with from a child. That is enough to absolve you. Your servants have heard. Come, Sacha."

Papa Czernovic could not endure to make his exit in ill humour. As Sacha, shouldering the box, coolly opened the hall door with his disengaged hand, and went out, his father turned to the little group in the hall, and

made a speech, addressing himself mainly to Lady Lowry, but including the others by a dexterous use of eye and voice.

“Goot-bye, honourable lady,” he said. “You must not take ill dat Nona cannot live no longer wiz you. Nona is artist—born artist, and all what is doll is death to her. Dis your house is full of comfortable, but doll, dear lady—doll; *ach langweilig* is dis house for artists! So a lady as you cannot understand perhaps Nona. Nona is a very ve—ery fine little violin what must be tooned and touched wiz delicate fingers. She is all artist; but she have a goot heart. I know de world, honourable lady. I see how you are respectable and surprised at Nona; but dere is natures what cares not for boarding, cares not for lodging, cares not for washing, in comparison wiz dere imaginations. I—ach Gott, I am old. I like dinners, ja! I love de comfortable. I am de big drum in de orchestra—de kettledrum, ha! I am not sensitiff. I stand de drubbing, ja! But Nona!—A fine little violin, honourable lady. If you play him well it is music to bring your soul in your ears:—if you play him bet, he squeak like de devil! Goot-bye. I dank you for Nona.”

With these words, and an almost affec-

tionate wave of the hand which comprehended James and the housemaid—greatly to their confusion—Papa Czernovic bowed himself out of the house. Sacha had already handed Nona into the cab, and as soon as his father entered it, he climbed up on the box and they drove away.

Enone had left a note for Rosamond in Miss Lowry's dressing-room; but she had purposely timed her departure at an hour when she knew the aunt and niece had arranged to be out, so as to avoid seeing them. As she was being carried towards the Strand with Papa Czernovic seated beside her, she leaned back in the cab and closed her eyes. The old man did not importune her with questions. "You not wish to talk, eh?" he said; "Goot!" Then he philosophically plunged into his own reflections, assisted by a cigarette.

She was received by the whole family with the same quiet acceptance of her moods, and the same absence of expressed curiosity as to her motives. That Nona should come back to them when it so pleased her seemed to be a fact as little open to discussion or criticism as that grass should be green. Their minds asked no explanation of such natural phenomena. The mother and her daughters

squeezed themselves into one sleeping chamber; the father and sons shared another; and thus a bed-room—the best and airiest—was left for CEnone, and she was installed into the possession of it without further formalities. “Mother has had your room swept, Nona,” said the eldest daughter, speaking in a sort of *lingua franca* compounded of French and German. And Mamma Czernovic added in her native Russian dialect that she had even had the wooden floor scrubbed on the previous evening, and had kept a fire burning there all night to dry it; as she supposed that CEnone, after a prolonged residence amongst thoroughbred English people, might probably have adopted some of their prejudices and customs.

In the evening, before going to St. Cecilia’s Hall, old Czernovic drew CEnone aside, and put into her hand three sovereigns. They were what remained, he said, of Belassopoulo’s last remittance, after he had repaid himself sundry small expenses incurred for CEnone on her leaving Miss Cribb’s school for Lady Lowry’s house. “Keep them,” said CEnone. “You must be paid for having me here. And three sovereigns will go but a little way towards reimbursing you.” But Czernovic positively refused. They were doing well, he

said; very well. They were saving money every week, and there was some talk of his getting a partnership in the business of a musical instrument seller, and retiring with his wife from public life after this season. The young folks would still form an excellent quartet, and would easily get engagements. "Ta, ta, ta," said he in reply to CEnone's remonstrances. "Vot is dis, mein kind? Are you not one of us? Are ve Philister? Ven you was rich, I don't say; I take all you giff. But ve is not honourable Lord Lowrys dat you need dreat us so lofty!"

"When did you hear from my father last, and where was he? I want to write to him, Papa Czernovic."

The old man looked at her in amazement. It was the very first time in his remembrance of her that CEnone had expressed such a wish. He was unable to give her any precise information. The latest address he had was to the care of certain Greek merchants at Constantinople; but that was a long time ago. However, CEnone could write if she pleased, and he would forward the letter. "Do you be tired of dese English respectable Philister, and want to go away in foreign parts, Nona?" said Papa Czernovic, looking at her shrewdly.

"I am tired of myself, I think ; and I want to get away from *that* if I could," answered CEnone with smiling lips and serious eyes.

"Ach Gott, you should hev studied de clavier mit earnest ! Dat is your real self vot your play on de clavier. You should have been a great virtuosa, Nona. You should have been a woman Lizst, ha ! And den wiz hard work you not never be tired of yourself, ja !"

"No ; it is *not* my real self that I play on the pianoforte. Music is not my life. But it does not matter. I shall write to my father at once."

So CEnone settled herself once more in the midst of those people, whose ways and manners and mixture of simplicity and cunning were at once so familiar and so strange to her after the very different scenes and people she had been living amongst.



## CHAPTER XVII.

CENONE had not been four and twenty hours in Mr. Quickit's house before she received a note from Rosamond. It had been enclosed in one to Mrs. Peppiat, and had been left at Howard Buildings by Captain Pep himself. It was written in Rosy's usual impulsive and outspoken fashion, and plainly showed that events were happening in Sir Cosmo Lowry's household which threw the circumstance of Cenone's abrupt departure into the background. "Aunt Mary is going away back to Clevelen almost directly," wrote Rosamond; "and I am not to go with her. Grandpapa's will isn't his real will, it seems, and they are going to look for it; and Mr. Flint came and stayed two hours this morning, and Aunt Mary looks worried to death. And oh! Nony, to think of your going away and leaving me like that! I am all by myself now, or shall be when Aunt Mary goes. I don't wonder at

your wanting to get away from this house ; but you need not have gone so suddenly, and you might have told me where to write. I send this to Aunt Leonora, for I think she will know where the Czernovics live ; and I know you are with them, for the servants here are talking of nothing else but those queer people whom you went away with. Lady Lowry's maid asked Aunt Mary's maid if they really were Russians, for she had heard so, and could not believe it. Just as if it was disgraceful to be a Russian ! But that Moore is a stupid creature, and gives herself such airs that she is quite insupportable. Oh dear, what shall I do when everybody is gone ? As to papa, I never see him ; and he does not talk much when I do. I am screwing up my courage to ask him to let me go and pay a visit to Aunt Leonora, and then you can meet me there. Wouldn't that be lovely ? And who do you think is undertaking to convey this and another little note to Aunt Nora's house ? But you would never guess. Why, Mr. Wigmore ! And he's as good-natured as ever he can be to me, and spoke so kindly of you that I'll never laugh at him any more, although he does talk nonsense, and thinks Lady Lowry such a 'delightfully natural

woman,' he says. He doesn't know her one bit. Though, indeed, for that matter, all sorts of horrid things are *natural* enough, I suppose, and people too! Mind you write to me directly, and then perhaps I may forgive you for running away. If you can't come to see me, do go and see Aunt Nora and Uncle Pep. They are so kind and sensible that I am sure they would help you and advise you if you would only let them. Don't be a proud ancient Greek, now, Nona! What's the use? We might just as well have been carved in white marble if we were meant to stand in an attitude stiff and cold like gods and goddesses. But, on the contrary, we are all made of warm flesh and blood—or *almost* all of us. I have my doubts about Lady Lowry. I think she is only pink wax and white leather and sawdust."

There was not a word in the letter about Major Maude. That was the first thought which occurred to poor CEnone as she read. Why should not he have been entrusted with the note for her, instead of that frivolous, chattering Wigmore? Perhaps he had not been to Green Street since she had left it! There was a subtle comfort in that thought. To be sure it was best, far best, that Maude

should not have been entrusted with Rosamond's note, or with any missive which should bring him into communication with herself. She had resolved to disappear from his world. But still she could not help being comforted by the thought that he was not constantly with Mary Lowry. Yes; it was best, far best, that she should not see him. The sight of her pale face would only vex him, and he would ask her to be careful of her health, and try to get a situation to go abroad. And she could not tell him what made her so wan, or why she pined and woke in the long nights, and felt listless and hopeless in the dim days. She could not even say to him that she longed to go away, and share her father's wandering life. He would oppose it, and question her, and advise her, and speak to her with the grave, soft kindness of an elder brother to a wayward child, and——no, she could not bear it! It was far, far best that he should not come; and then as the jangling door-bell sounded suddenly through the house, her heart fluttered painfully with the unreasoning hope that it might be he!

The Czernovics were all away at their morning concert in St. Cecilia's Hall. They sang there twice a day now, and were very

successful. Enone was alone in the dusty, shabby sitting-room, trying to mend a poor, frayed, little black silk jacket which had seen better days ; but her thin hands, which looked as if they were the hands of some mediæval ascetic saintly figure carved in ivory, dropped wearily on to her lap at every few minutes, and she leaned her head back against her chair and breathed heavily. The jangling bell set her pulses beating fast, and the sharp, discordant sound seemed to be tingling through her veins. If it might be he ! It was absurd, unlikely, undesirable even : yes, she knew all that. But—if it only might be he ! A step came quickly and lightly, though with strength, upstairs. It was so like his step ; but, of course, that was only her foolish fancy. It came nearer swiftly to the landing, to the door. Enone put out her hand as if to stop the approach of something that she feared—a hand knocked, a voice spoke ; in a second Vincent Maude was in the room, holding her hand, looking down upon her, speaking she knew not what ; she only saw and heard through a strange mist. But then the mist cleared away, and he was there still, sitting near her, and talking to her in his kindly, manly voice.

He was not talking of herself. His mind was preoccupied with another topic. He did not reproach her with having left Green Street. He did not say, "Why did you not tell me, or send for me, Nona?" in his old way. He was talking of some annoyance and trouble in the Lowry household. That was what interested him most in all the world. Enone's heart swelled with a hot, bitter pain. He did not care for *her*. No one cared for her!

"And I am afraid, Nona," said Major Maude, "that that fellow Flagge is at the bottom of it all. It has annoyed her a great deal."

"Annoyed whom?"

"Did you not understand? I say that Miss Lowry has been so vexed and hurt, less at the fact itself than because it was, in the first place, kept from her, and then told her in such a way, and put in such a light."

"Oh, Miss Lowry? Yes."

"Now, I want you to tell me frankly, Nona—but I need not say that, for you are always as true as steel——"

She bowed her head and dropped her eyes. "What I do say shall be true. That at least I can promise. As to frankness, that is different."

"I want you to tell me, my dear child, what Flagge has been saying to you on the subject; how far you were acquainted beforehand with what has been going on."

"I—don't know. What is it?" asked Ænone, passing her hand over her eyes and forehead.

"Why, this whole story of the missing will. Have you not understood me all this time, Nona?"

"Is there a will missing?"

"I am glad to find that you know nothing of the matter. I should have been terribly put out by the idea of that fellow mixing you up in his plots and plans."

Then Maude briefly told her of the facts revealed to Sir Cosmo by Quickit. Mr. Flint had had an interview with Miss Lowry that morning, and was half inclined to suspect a conspiracy in which Flagge had an active part. Ænone's name had been mentioned. Mr. Flint would probably wish to see her sooner or later; and if so, Maude was sure she would give him every assistance in discovering the truth. The girl bent her mind to follow what he was saying, and her natural quickness helped her to a tolerably clear view of the case. There were details which she

did not understand. But she had constantly been witness to Lady Lowry's discontent with the provisions of her father-in-law's will, and now many of her words and hints were explained.

"Well," she said, coldly, "what is it to me?" she had nearly added, "or to you?"

"In the first place, it is a matter which closely concerns Miss Lowry, and I am sure, Enone, that you are not ungrateful for all her goodness to you."

He made a little pause for her to speak, but she remained silent. Then he went on, "And in the next place, you would desire—all your friends would desire—that you should appear clear from the slightest—what shall I say?—connivance, even passive connivance, with Flagge's machinations."

"Oh! who suspects me of—connivance?"

"No one! I hope no one. But of course a fellow like Flagge will endeavour to draw you and every one else into the net. The more people are mixed up in it the more he shelters himself in the crowd."

"Has Dr. Flagge said anything about me?"

"Not that I am aware of. But there has as yet been no opportunity. Lady Lowry



declares that Flagge's information was given to him by the spirits from your mouth."

"And the information is that the old man who died made a will here in London, and that the landlord of this house witnessed it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that information seems to be true, whoever gave it."

"If one can trust Quickit's testimony."

"Well—and what more can I say?"

"Flagge says that the spirits—I am ashamed to echo his jargon—have been talking through your mouth. Do you remember saying anything to Flagge about Sir Rupert Lowry?"

"If I have spoken it must have been when I was in the magnetic sleep. How can I tell what I said?"

"I wish to heaven, Nona, that you had never had anything to do with this thing!"

"Why? Because it may do Miss Lowry harm?"

"Because it may do you harm, Nona!"

"That does not matter."

"It matters a great deal! Why do you speak so, CEnone? It is not kind to those who are interested in you. The Czernovics are really devoted to you. Why should you speak in that tone?"

"Tell me, at least, what harm *you* think can come to me because I have been mesmerized, and because I am a clairvoyante—if I am one."

"It is not merely the mesmerizing, Nona. It is the fact of being brought into constant communication with a man like Flagge which seems to me so bad. It is bad in every way. He is thoroughly unscrupulous, he is greedy of gain, he will lie and cheat, and make you a seeming accomplice in his lies without remorse. Any confidence with such a man is dangerous—and even humiliating."

"I do not believe that Dr. Flagge would sacrifice me 'without remorse,' as you say, either to Lady Lowry or to any one else."

"He is a low fellow, Nona."

"He is not so low as Sir Cosmo Lowry's wife."

"I can't discuss that with you."

"There is no need to discuss it. You know it is true. Every one must see it who knows her."

"But that is not quite to the purpose. The man cannot help being ignorant, but he can help being an impostor and a liar."

Enone turned round with a quick impulse. "It is easy to say all that," she cried, "but

is it so sure that he is an impostor? If he had discovered a great fortune for Miss Lowry, would he have been an impostor? All that he has told hitherto has been proved to be true. There is a witness to corroborate his words. Perhaps they think I am an impostor, too!"

"Ænone!"

"Dr. Flagge has more heart and feeling than many who think themselves his superiors. Lady Lowry would trample over me if I were in her path, and never turn her head to see whether I were alive or dead. She is coarsely insolent, and not high-minded or truthful,—and yet I have not been told that intercourse with her is dangerous and humiliating!"

"I am sorry, Ænone, that you were so unhappy with the Lowrys," answered Maude, gently. "I had no idea that your feelings were so much hurt and irritated by Lady Lowry as I now perceive they must have been. I had fancied that the companionship of—of your friend Rosamond would have made your stay there pleasant to you."

What dim, unacknowledged perception of the truth made Vincent Maude refrain from mentioning Mary's name? It had hovered on his tongue when he spoke of the com-

panionship which might have made CEnone's stay with the Lowrys pleasant. But he had checked its utterance. The poor girl was in a strange, unhappy, morbid state of mind, he said to himself, and he would treat her with the tenderest gentleness: he would spare her any word which might hurt her overstrained sensitiveness. But how could Mary Lowry's name hurt it? He did not put that question to his reason, but followed a sympathetic instinct, and forebore to speak to CEnone of the one being with whom his thoughts were just then so anxiously occupied.

"Since you had made up your mind to leave Green Street, the best thing you could do was to come at once to the Czernovics," he said, assuming a more cheerful tone.

"When did you arrive here?"

"Yesterday."

"And what is your present plan of life?"

"You wouldn't approve it. I would rather not tell you just yet."

"As you please, Nona."

"You are not offended with me?"

"Offended? No." But his tone showed that he was a little hurt, nevertheless. CEnone put out her poor thin hand and timidly touched his sleeve. "Pray do not be angry with

me!" she said. "I don't think I *could* bear that."

"My child—angry! I should never think of being angry with you, Nona."

"No; I am not worth being angry with. No, no, I don't mean that! I did not intend to speak harshly. I think some evil spirit is prompting my words to-day."

Maude looked at her pityingly and anxiously. "My poor Nona, I am convinced that something is preying on your mind. I have seen it for some time past——"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Mind, I don't want to force any confidence from you, my child. I have not the slightest right to do so. But remember that if you want any help or advice, such as a brother might give you, you must frankly ask me for it. Will you promise that you will ask me?"

"I—I can't. I'm afraid to promise. But don't be angry with me, pray don't be angry with me!"

The tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she turned her eyes with a pathetic pleading look up to his. Maude stood up, and taking her head between his two hands, kissed her forehead. "My dear girl," he said, "it is impossible that I should be angry with

you! What, my own little Nona, whom I have known ever since she was not higher than my knee? No, no; you and I are too old friends, and too fast friends, to quarrel, foolish child! But I want you to understand that you can give me no task I would more willingly undertake than to help you and advise you. I am an awkward fellow, I dare say, and perhaps I make blunders now and then, and don't express myself as I would. You're such a sensitive little plant, you see. I feel as if I were handling the wings of a butterfly with my clumsy fingers when I talk to you. But you understand me, don't you? Come, come, Nona, don't cry! Don't cry, my darling! You're harassed and worn out, and over-excited, what with one thing and another. Don't cry, little Nona!"

He still had one hand upon her head, and Enone had taken the other hand between her own, and pressed it to her lips, sobbing convulsively. "I wish I could die now," she murmured; "I wish—I wish—I could!" But after a little while she became calmer, and laid her head back in her chair, still holding Maude's hand with a clinging grasp. Maude waited, gentle, patient, and compassionate, until the short struggling sobs ceased,

and the thin little hands relaxed their pressure. "There, there," he said soothingly, "you were fairly overwrought, and the tears won't do any harm—only we don't want any more of 'em, eh, Nona? I'm afraid I have vexed you by telling you of this business at the Lowrys. But you need not fear that any one in that family will connect you for an instant with Flagge's underhand doings."

"Will Miss Lowry be poor if they find another will?"

"Who is to say? But it is not that which frets her. It is the thought that her brother behaves badly to her—even distrustfully. He's the most—never mind! Let us keep a calm sough, as they say in the North. All I wanted to be sure of was that that black-guard Flagge hadn't dragged you into his intrigues. Keep clear of him, Nona. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Remember me to the Czernovics."

"Stay one instant."

There was a pause, during which Enone kept her eyes fixed on the ground. All at once she raised them and said, "I hope no evil will come to Miss Lowry through all this. You know I could not help what I spoke in

my trance. She has been good to me, and I hope she will be happy. Tell her that I said so."

The look, the tone, the manifest effort and struggle with which she spoke, suddenly transformed Maude's dim instinctive perception of the truth into a clear and vivid conviction. Enone was jealous of Mary Lowry, and her better feelings warred with her jealousy, and tormented her.

Jealous! Poor, foolish, romantic child! "It is all as fanciful as a fairy tale, in her inexperienced mind," said Maude to himself. "But she is fretting, and pining, as if it were real and serious enough. How could one have guessed——?" The Major did not finish his sentence even mentally, and there was a hot flush on his forehead when he came upon Mr. Flint at the bottom of the stairs.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

“WELL,” said my lady triumphantly, “I hope you’re satisfied now, Cosmo, that I was not quite a fool, and that I did right to believe in the spirits!”

Mr. Flint, from being the object of her dislike and suspicion, was very nearly transformed into a Daniel come to judgment by his unexpected adhesion to her hypothesis that Sir Rupert Lowry had made a testament subsequent to the one proved and acted on. His interview with Quickit had indeed convinced Mr. Flint that such was the case. He had gone to Quickit prepared to unmask a conspirator, but he had come away satisfied of the man’s honesty. Astonishing and vexing as the discovery was, he could not honestly refuse to admit his conviction that Sir Rupert had made a second will, and had kept the fact that he had made it secret from his old friend *and* family lawyer. Mr. Flint could not

honestly refuse to admit this much—to his mind the admission by no means involved all the consequences which Lady Lowry would fain have deduced from it—so he did admit it; and by so doing gained Lady Lowry's favourable opinion as to his intelligence. Of his honesty she did not think so highly.

“You see, Cosmo,” she said, “this Mr. Flint thinks you stand a very good chance of being whole and sole master at Lowry, and of having other good things besides. There'll be leases, and contracts, and deeds, and all manner of law business to do; so, of course, as he knows which side his bread is buttered, he don't want to make an enemy of you.”

“Pooh! Mr. Flint wouldn't care one straw, Sally, whether I give him my law business or not.”

“Oh, that's nonsense! If he wouldn't care a straw, why should he keep an office in Elcaster, and pay clerks and all that? Of course he looks to have your patronage, and I don't blame him for that. You may depend his behaviour in this matter shows which way the wind blows. If he thought Mary was going to get the upper hand he would turn up his nose at the spirits and at Mr. Quickit, and all, just as—some other folks did at first. But

it's too late for *you* to pooh-pooh the thing now, Cosmo, at all events."

Sir Cosmo in truth no longer even affected to pooh-pooh it. He sneered, because nature and habit had made it impossible for him not to sneer; but he treated the question of his father's will as one of vital importance. There was not one of his waking hours in which the subject was not present to his mind. He was continually making mental calculations of the arrears of interest that would be due to him on the money which Mary inherited under the present will, and building castles in the air with tall columns of arithmetical figures. This and that investment which he had already dabbled in should be added to. Such and such shares would yield such and such profit. He should be able to afford to place a few sums in speculations of greater risk, and proportionately greater gains, than the miserable three, four, or five per cent. which he could now have with safety. He grew leaner and more haggard day by day. In a word, he was being devoured by the slow fever of avarice.

And yet at the same time, by a strange contradiction, there grew up in the very innermost depths of his conscience a sentiment of

respect and sympathy for his sister Mary stronger than he had ever felt before. It was true that he allowed his wife—emboldened by the success of her investigations so far—to utter, unchecked, very broad insinuations to the effect that Mary must have known something about that London will, and that she certainly had very strong motives for concealing its existence, and possibly even for putting it out of the way. He longed, with all the strength of the strongest passions within him—greed and love of power—to gain possession of the home which now sheltered his sister, and of the greater part of the income which she now enjoyed. He would have struggled as ruthlessly as Sarah herself (although with less force and singleness of purpose) against any attempt to quash the search for the missing will. But yet he secretly resented all Sarah's coarse and unfeeling words about Mary; and he secretly—half unconsciously—began to appreciate his sister's fine qualities, and to take a queer sort of pride in the superiority of her behaviour throughout these circumstances to the behaviour of his wife. Mary was a Lowry, thoroughbred. Mary was incapable of vulgar littleness. Mary's sore feeling on the subject

was the result of what was good, and not bad. She resented the intolerable suspicions which Sarah had neither the will nor the power to conceal from her. It was the want of confidence which hurt her, not the fear of loss. All these considerations, whilst they became clearer and clearer to Sir Cosmo, by no means influenced him so as to make him pursue his purpose in a manner less offensive to his sister's feelings.

Mary resolved to leave London on the eighteenth of December. She had always intended to spend Christmas Day at Clevenal, and recent events had made her desire to get away from her brother's house with as little delay as might be. She was thoroughly unhappy there. She did not, indeed, delude herself by supposing that happiness awaited her at Clevenal; but there would be at least solitude, if she chose to have it. The moral atmosphere of the house in Green Street had become insupportable to her. She felt sometimes as if her physical respiration were actually oppressed there. How little she had guessed, when she first received the announcement of her brother's marriage, and so generously responded to it by welcoming his young wife to her home, what a dark shadow entered

her life with that rose-cheeked, fair-haired woman! There were moments when Mary felt ashamed to think that her sister-in-law possessed so much power to wound her—moments when she declared to herself that she was abased by giving any heed to Sarah's coarse and clumsy thrusts, and when she resolved to keep her mind in a region above their reach. But of course such resolves were vain. Sarah was always able to strike at her feelings through Cosmo. The thought that the brother to whom she had been so loyal and loving through many weary years should repay her with coldness, ingratitude, and even suspicion, pierced Mary's heart. Her affection for Cosmo—that sisterly tenderness which had survived so long a separation and so many adverse circumstances—had certainly not remained the same since she and her brother had met again. It was impossible to love Cosmo present as she had loved Cosmo absent. But it was also impossible for Mary to shut her heart against him utterly, or to look on his conduct with the same cool and clear-headed disapproval with which she might have regarded it in a stranger.

There are women who would have cried and talked copiously to two or three intimate friends

—or, such not being within reach, to friends who were not intimate,—and would thus have obtained solace. The mere utterance and iteration of words seems to have a soothing effect on the troubles of some persons, and lulls them like the unmeaning hush-a-bye of a nurse to an infant. But Mary's temperament was not of the kind which can take comfort in saying over and over again that it is unhappy and ill-used. And your silent sorrows are ever the most obstinate. There was only one person near at hand in whom Mary felt impelled to confide even a small portion of the cares that oppressed her spirits, and that person was Mrs. Peppiat. The two had become great friends, although they had been able to meet but seldom. Mrs. Peppiat was at once remote from, and interested in, the circle of persons amongst whom Mary was now living, and this combination made it tempting to talk about them to her. She was sufficiently removed from their stage to have a just focus in looking at them: and sufficiently near it to appreciate even the slightest traits of their behaviour. No by-play of these actors was lost on Mrs. Peppiat, and, moreover, she understood all that Mary did not say about the family in *Green Street*, quite as well as that which she did say.

"Bless you, Northam," she would say to her husband, "Cosmo Lowry hasn't changed really, since the old Malta days. Not a bit of it! He is just what he was then, *only a good deal more so*. I always hated his grudging way of talking of his sister Mary. And poor Bell could have told a tale of his sneering, dissatisfied, suspicious temper."

To say truth, "poor Bell" had told many such a tale, not being either reticent or dignified. But to one who had lived in such close intimacy with Cosmo and his family as Leonora Peppiat had done in the days of Cosmo's struggling poverty, the tale was one which told itself. And now the same nature was showing a fuller development under the circumstances of rank and an unexpected inheritance; but it *was* the same, as Leonora declared. She and Pep were not quite agreed in their estimate of my lady. Usually, the fact of being a woman enlisted all Pep's sympathy, and he had made excuses for feminine shortcomings before now with the gallantry and irrationality of his chivalric temperament. But on Sarah, Lady Lowry, he had no mercy. He attributed all the troubles that happened in Green Street to her whole and sole influence. Cosmo was



of a dry, grudging temper, if you liked :— a curmudgeon, in fact. Of course he was ! But as to that woman—— Pep could not trust himself to put into words what he thought of “that woman.” He seemed to resent the very fact of her being a woman, as though she were claiming his forbearance on false pretences. He and Mrs. Flint would have cordially joined in loading her ladyship’s plump white shoulders with all the unpleasant circumstances which had happened, were happening, or might ever happen in the Lowry family. In vain Leonora—who certainly did not love Sarah, would endeavour to represent to him that the latter was ignorant of the world, narrow-minded, and inexperienced ; and that it behoved her husband to oppose and guide her when she was going wrong, and not to accept with avidity all the advice she proffered, provided it did but follow the course of his own desires.

“ ‘Oppose and guide !’ ” cried Pep, stuttering with impatient indignation. “Did—did—did ye ever hear of opposing and guiding a vigorous young porker on his way to market ?”

“Northam ! I’m ashamed of you, sir !”

“By the—the—the Lord Harry, I’d rather drive ten pigs ten miles than my Lady Lowry

one, there! I would, upon my sacred word of honour!"

"Northam, Northam, she's a horrid woman, and I don't defend her. But I know that men can always get their own way when they want it enough. If she asked Cosmo to settle an annuity on us, do you think he'd do it? No, no; she must have more obstinacy and force of will than I give her credit for if she could induce him to give away money. Getting it is another matter. Folks are not hard to persuade to what pleases them."

"I think, Leonora," returned her husband with a profound shake of the head, "that you don't make sufficient allowance for the power of stupidity. It's an enormous force in this world;—quite awful. Now, Cosmo has some brains, and that puts him at an immense disadvantage with his wife. Oh, by Jove! when you get pure unalloyed stupidity like Lady Lowry's, it's an awful power! It's Heaven's own mercy that it's generally adulterated with a gleam or two of intelligence, or I don't know what would become of us! I tell you what it is, Nora; there's a great deal of talk about the intellectual development of women—higher education, and all that—but if the sex knew where real power lies they'd

try to keep stupid." And the Captain retired behind his pipe, lost in the tremendous vision his fancy had conjured up of a world in which all the women should be Lady Lowrys.

He was still absorbed in this conception of a state of things from which all feminine brightness, tact, and insight should be utterly banished, when Mary Lowry drove up to the door, and asked to see Mrs. Peppiat. She had come, she said, to say "good-bye." Mrs. Peppiat received her in Herr Schulze's front parlour, whose tenant was absent at his occupation in the City, and where Herr Schulze's harmonium was at present reposing in silence, and leaving Juno's nerves unruffled by what Rosamond called the "quivery stop."

"And you are really going away so soon, dear Miss Lowry," said Leonora, looking at the beautiful pale face before her, with so sweet and candid an expression of ungrudging admiration as made her own homely countenance very pleasant to look upon.

Yes ; Mary was going away very soon. She had always intended to be at home by Christmas. She would not leave London without coming to say farewell at Nelson Place. She spoke with her usual serene cheerfulness, but to Norah's quick eyes and

ears her face and her voice betrayed that she was ill at ease. "I fear," said Mrs. Peppiat, "that your visit to London has not been a pleasant one."

"I cannot say that it has been pleasant. But I have had one great comfort in being near Rosamond, and in finding she is quite unspoiled by the change in her worldly fortunes."

"Oh, Rosy, bless her, is too sound-hearted for that. I think it must be a very poor, narrow, pitiful nature that doesn't grow sunnier in the sunshine."

The instant she had said the words Mrs. Peppiat's honest face flushed scarlet. How could she have made so heedless a speech? It was worthy of Northam himself, who was always blurting out what seemed to be cutting allusions, and being all the while very innocent of any malicious intention.

"I'm afraid so," answered Mary gravely.

"I mean—particularly at Rosy's age, you know. As we grow older, years and the world make most of us sourer and harder."

"I'm afraid so," said Mary again.

"Your old friend Mr. Flint is in London, I hear. I am glad of that."

"Yes; it is fortunate for me that some business of his own should have called him

to town just now, for his advice and his presence are a great support to me. Of course you have heard——?” Mary paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

“Of course I have heard something—a good deal—of what has been going on in Green Street. But pray don’t think yourself bound to say one word on the subject to me more than you are fully inclined to say. It is very pleasant to give and receive confidence when it is quite spontaneous. But there is nothing I have a greater horror of than levying confidences as a kind of black mail from one’s friends. I hope Northam and I never do it. But there are people who take your silently minding your own business as a personal affront! If I could help you, or do the least little thing for you, dear Miss Lowry, I hope you would let me. My poor sister Bell left me a legacy of gratitude to you. Almost the last thing she spoke to me about was your generous and staunch behaviour to her and hers.”

The contrast between this abundant recognition of her sentiments on the part of a stranger and the cold suspicion with which she was regarded by her brother made itself powerfully felt by Mary. The tears sprang

to her eyes. She took Mrs. Peppiat's hand. "I should like to talk to you about it," she said simply. And then in a few minutes she related the story of the missing will so far as she herself was acquainted with it.

Mrs. Peppiat listened quietly. Much of the tale was not new to her, and she showed no surprise in hearing it; only a steady, undemonstrative kind of attention. "And what do you think of it yourself, Miss Lowry?" she said.

"Think of it?"

"Of the statement made by this Mr. Quickit. I don't ask you what you think of Dr. Flagge, because I shouldn't like to insult your discernment by such a question."

"What can I think of it? It is more to the purpose what Mr. Flint thinks of it, and Mr. Flint believes it."

"Would you mind, dear Miss Lowry, my calling Northam for a minute? Since you *have* spoken of this matter, I should like to hear what Northam has to say. Of course I should not have let you leave the house without his seeing you; only I thought I'd let him just finish his pipe and get rid of the smell of tobacco a little first. But if you wouldn't mind——"

Mary assured her that she was quite ready to condone and endure the tobacco, and by her own suggestion accompanied Mrs. Peppiat into the back parlour, where sate the Captain plunged in smoky visions.

The Captain, after he had expressed his delight at seeing Miss Lowry, his fear of offending her by the odours of his pipe, and his regret at her approaching departure—all expressed somewhat incoherently, but with much heartiness, and in the soft, winning manner which the sight of a pretty woman always elicited from Pep—entered very eagerly into the topic of Sir Rupert's will. Mary was surprised to find how copiously it had been discussed in the Peppiats' circle. Nothing is more surprising to persons of simplicity and small experience of the world than to discover how interesting their private affairs are to people who care not a straw for themselves personally. Demayne had talked of it; Bob Doery had talked of it; Mr. Quickit had talked of it—but with considerable oracular reserve. And latterly Mr. Quickit's utterances, whatever they were, had not come under the Peppiats' notice, inasmuch as the Captain had not been to Howard Buildings for some time.

"As for me," said honest Nora, "I never should attach weight to anything that was said by Mr. Quickit—never!"

"Pooh, Leonora! Why not, my dear? That's nonsense."

"Why not? Because he's connected with a set of blood-suckers; usurious horse-leeches! I'd Castor and Pollux them, indeed! You'll never persuade me that it's legal, Northam. Or if it is—more shame for the law, that's all!"

"We won't go into questions of political economy, my dear—nor private economy either," added the Captain hastily. The Loan Society was a sore subject with his Leonora, and Pep's negotiations with Castor and Pollux in old days had been conducted in opposition to her warning and advice. "The point is now Quickit's credibility, and as to that, Nora, I suppose you'll admit that Mr. Flint is a better judge than either you or I."

"That is what I say, Mr. Peppiat," said Mary. "Mr. Flint is satisfied that the witness is speaking the truth. And indeed what motive could he have for giving false testimony in the matter?"

"Why, as to that, there's no knowing



what——” Pep was beginning with a significant grimace, when his wife stopped him by a look. He had been about to pour forth his opinion that Lady Lowry was capable of conspiracy, bribery, corruption, or almost any other offence, for the purpose of securing the inheritance. But, checked by Nora’s eye, he paused, and added with two or three little nods, “To be sure !”

“And of course,” continued Mary, quite simply and earnestly, “my sole desire is that my father’s real will may be carried out faithfully.”

“To be sure !” cried the Captain once more, but with a very different emphasis.

“It—it—almost seems,” Mary went on, speaking as though she were thinking aloud, “as if they fancied I wish to smother the investigation, and keep the truth from coming to light.”

The Captain made a most curious gurgling noise in his effort to swallow down a too energetic expletive that rose to his lips ; and Mrs. Peppiat exclaimed indignantly, “Oh, that’s impossible—impossible !”

“You think so ? I am glad to hear you say it. You do think that it is impossible

for—for any one who knows me to entertain such an idea ? ”

“Quite impossible !” answered Leonora vigorously. Her husband said afterwards that he thought there was no one like your habitually honest spoken folks to tell a lie heartily at a pinch.

“I am morbid, perhaps, and fancy things. But the truth is, that it has hurt me that this discovery should have been kept secret from me even for a day. Surely I ought to have been told at once. However, I don’t desire to dwell on that.”

“And what is the discovery worth now they have made it ? ” said Pep. “Nothing more likely than that Sir Rupert should have made three or four wills, or three or four dozen wills for aught I know, and destroyed them again.”

Mary shook her head. “I do not think so,” she said. “That is not like my father. He was not irresolute.”

“But, my dear Miss Lowry, what is your theory, then ? You believe that Sir Rupert did make a will in London ? ”

“Yes.”

“And you know that he never revealed

that fact either to his confidential lawyer or to you?"

"Yes."

"You know, too, that after his return from London, he, directly or indirectly, admitted that the will there in Mr. Flint's possession, and subsequently proved and carried out, was in truth his definite last will and testament?"

"Yes; at least he never hinted at the existence of any other, when Mr. Flint alluded to the disposition of his property."

"Well, then——!"

"But I think," pursued Mary in a low voice, "that he had it in his mind to tell us of some change in his arrangements before he died. I think that at the very last there was something which he longed to say, and could not. I never shall forget the strange yearning look in his eyes. I told Mr. Flint of it at the time. But I little guessed then what it might mean."

Pep's countenance fell as he listened. My lady had a case, then, after all! And a pretty strong case, apparently! That was the thought which passed through the Captain's mind.

"But, after all," said he at length, "conjecture is vain in such a case. The law cannot concern itself with what might have been. Nor—if you will allow me to say so—need you do so, either."

"Of course not! Quite right, Northam," said his wife; and she nodded approvingly. Northam had so much ability when he gave it fair play! And expressed himself so admirably!

"I cannot tell, of course, whether the will which my father made in London is still in existence. But I have firmly resolved to spare no pains in searching for it. If it is in Lowry Place, it shall be found."

Pep and his wife exchanged glances. Of course, that was what was to be expected from a woman like Mary Lowry, thought Mrs. Peppiat. Pep thought so, too; only—only if there was an unjust, cantankerous will in existence which deprived that delightful creature of her ancestral home and the luxuries which so exquisitely became her high-bred style of beauty, would it be an unforgiven sin to put the said cantankerous document in the fire, and hold one's tongue about it for evermore? That was the thought

which vaguely and mistily passed through the Captain's Celtic brain, as he glanced from Mary to his wife. And it recurred again, when Miss Lowry took her leave, with the cordial sweetness and unaffected grace which had captivated his admiration from the first moment he saw her.

END OF VOL. II.



8. The first of these is the fact that the system is not in a steady state. The system is in a steady state only if the rate of change of the system is zero. In this case, the rate of change of the system is not zero, and the system is not in a steady state.





